

The BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Devoted To Far West Life



BUFFALO BILL AND THE SORCERESS

OR PAWNEE BILL AND THE FIGHT FOR THE PLACER
BY THE AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL"



STREET & SMITH,
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NEW YORK.

"Don't make a fight," she urged; "for you will be killed if you do. Porcupine and his warriors outnumber you ten to one."

THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION **STORIES** DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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BUFFALO BILL AND THE SORCERESS;

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

STAKING THE PLACER.

"If the man in the moon has eyes and can see this far, he must think that Buffalo Bill's bunch is engaged in peculiar business."

Pawnee Bill stood up and looked about, with a glance thrown over his shoulder at the moon, low down over the mountain behind him.

He had been digging in the sandy bed of the Perdidas River, in the gray of early morning, and now stood in the water, which came halfway to the tops of his high boots.

"He'll think shore thet a colony o' beavers er mus'-rats is splashin' round wi' human clo'es on," said old Nick Nomad, who was planting a stake in the bank of the stream near by.

Buffalo Bill, also standing in the water, was sighting at the stake, to make sure that Nomad was placing it where it was wanted.

Baron Von Schnitzenhauser, on the other side of the narrow stream, was planting another stake, with the assistance of Buffalo Bill's young Piute Indian Little Cayuse.

"If the man in the moon is as wise as he is high up in the universe," Buffalo Bill remarked, "he'll know that it's a hurry-hustle that's driving us."

"Oddervise," the baron commented, "ve vouldt be sleebing sweet treams py our liddle beds in, adt der hodel, insteadt oof sblashing roundt in vater vot iss coldt enough to make a man t'ink he iss an icicle. Oof dot Inchun girl——"

"But she ain't Injun," corrected Nomad; "she is as white as I am."

"Vhich ain'dt saying mooch."

Having scooped up some of the river sand, Pawnee Bill "panned" it, and found in the bottom of his mining pan a number of grains of shining gold.

"This Perdidas placer is rich as cheese," he confided to Buffalo Bill. "As soon as Tybee Johnson gets a hunch that it's here, he'll be down, you can bet."

"It won't do him much good after we get the placer claims staked off," said the scout. He sighted, and waved his hands to Nomad. "Over that way, Nomad—a little bit to the right!"

"Thar she is," said the borderman, moving the stake.

"That's the place; now drive it down."

They talked, as they measured out and staked the placer claims, and their conversation revealed an interesting state of affairs.

On the mountain above them had dwelt a hermit whose name was Mark Merrill. In the Perdidas valley, within a stone's throw of where they were working, had been the home of old Porcupine, chief of the Utes of that region. With Porcupine's family had resided a young woman whom he claimed as his daughter, or granddaughter, and who was supposed to be an Indian, or, at least, a half blood.

But it had been found out that she was the daughter of the hermit, Mark Merrill; that old Porcupine had stolen her away at the time of the Meeker massacre, and, bringing her up with the Utes, had led her to think she was a half-breed.

She knew better now, and was with her father in the near-by town of Silver Bow, whither she had gone only the day before, after the Utes had tried to take her from Merrill, and had been frightened off by Pawnee Bill and others.

While residing with the Utes, the girl had discovered that in the Perdidas at that point was a rich placer. The Utes had worked it stealthily, and had sold the gold dust to a certain pawnbroker in the town, often sending the girl in with it.

The stealth of the Utes in this was justified, for in the town were many men who would have taken the placer from them, either by fraud or force, if they had known of its existence. The most formidable of these men was Tybee Johnson, the sheriff of the county, and a thorough-paced rascal.

After the fight of the Utes with the hermit, and the stampede scare thrown into them by Pawnee Bill, the Utes had abandoned the shanty near the Perdidas; but that they were still near, and ready to make trouble, was believed.

It was not fear of the Utes so much as of Tybee Johnson and his scoundrelly followers that had moved Buffalo Bill to make this night descent on the silent Perdidas, and stake out the boundaries of placer claims.

"We'll stake enough claims to make sure that we cover the whole of the placer, or the richest part of it," he said, as he worked and talked. "The girl says it isn't very wide."

They were finishing the work when the sun rose, and men came galloping down the valley.

"What did I tell you?" cried Pawnee, climbing out of the water. "There comes Johnson now, or I miss my guess."

It was Tybee Johnson, sure enough, at the head of a dozen armed horsemen.

He drew rein on the opposite bank of the stream, where the baron had set several stakes.

"What are you-all doing here?" he demanded, his face red with anger, on discovering that Buffalo Bill had got ahead of him.

"We have been staking out claims on this placer,"

the scout answered. "There are certain forms to be gone through with, when taking mining claims, and this is the first thing to be done."

"But you didn't discover that placer!" Johnson roared, unable to conceal his rage.

"Perhaps, then, you did!" retorted the scout quietly.

"That placer was discovered by old Porcupine," said Johnson, "and he has sold his rights to me and these men. We're down here to take possession."

"Don't you think you're a little bit late, Johnson?" the scout asked, with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "It seems to me that you are."

"I'm sheriff of this county," said Johnson, "and I order you to pull up them stakes and git out."

"By what authority?"

"By authority of my office as sheriff, and because we have bought this placer of its discoverer."

Buffalo Bill laughed in a manner to increase the sheriff's ire.

Ordinarily Tybee Johnson was a smooth-spoken individual, who prided himself on his Southern politeness.

"That amuses you, suh?" he snarled at the scout.

"It certainly does."

"You don't intend to obey my order as sheriff, suh?"

"I suppose we might as well come to an understanding about this, Johnson," said the scout, refusing to be irritated. "The one who is entitled to a mining claim is the one who, on discovering it, follows the forms of the law and regulations. You say this placer was discovered by the Ute, and you bought it of him. If that is so——"

"If it's so! Then you doubt my word, suh?"

"If it is so old Porcupine sold you a gold brick. For he had no title to this place. He had not staked it, nor filed papers."

"He told me, suh, that he had staked it."

"You see the stakes we put here ourselves; there were no others."

"How do I know—how does any one know—that you didn't pull up old Porcupine's stakes and throw them in the river?"

A bit of color came into the scout's cheeks.

"My word is usually accepted by those who know me! We staked these claims, to cover the placer—not because we intend to hold them, in the end, for ourselves. We intend to hold them for the one who really discovered the placer—Mark Merrill's daughter."

"If she says that she discovered the placer, is her word any better than Porcupine's?"

"Perhaps not to you; it would be to me. But that is beside the point, anyway."

"What is the point?" demanded Johnson. "All I know is, this placer belongs to me and my men here, and we're going to have it."

"This is the point: We believe the girl found this placer. But she did not take the legal steps to hold it for herself—because she did not know about them, or that she could hold it. So we are arranging to hold it for her."

Tybee Johnson sneered, and some of his men laughed scornfully.

"You're a healthy lot of philanthropists, you'd have us believe. But that oily gammon don't go down with us."

Nomad was beginning to show symptoms of a loss of self-control, and the mutterings of the baron were quite as loud. The Piute was silent, and Pawnee Bill was smiling.

"And, having staked out the claims," said the scout, "of course that makes them ours, for the present."

"Lick the crowd and pull up the stakes," shouted one of Johnson's followers.

Johnson's men drew about him, as if waiting for him to give such an order.

"If you should, by force, pull up our stakes, it would do you no good," argued Buffalo Bill; "for, you see, that would not change the fact that we had set them there, and the land courts would be forced to uphold our claims. So don't you think, Johnson, that you'd better go slow? Besides, we might take a notion to have something to say about it."

"You'd defy me—sheriff of the county?"

"So long as I know I am in the right, I'd defy any man living," was the scout's statement.

"Waugh!" Nomad bellowed, unable to curb his emotions longer. "Let ther ornery whelps try ter jump us, Buffler!"

"Dot iss idt!" panted the baron, fingering his revolvers. "Ve ar-re vanting a fight, eenyhow. Der excitement iss goot fer der indigestion."

"You cheap skates, come on!" squalled Nomad. "Fust man what lays a hand on these hyar stakes gits his medicine—you hear me!"

"My friends seem to be losing their temper," remarked the scout quietly. "You're sheriff, Johnson—I don't deny it; but I deny that a sheriff, or any other man, has a right to drive me from these claims."

For a minute it seemed that Johnson's rage would cause him to give way before the mutterings of his men. But the fact that he knew he was in the wrong cowed him.

Finally, he pulled back on his reins, drawing his horse away from the stream.

"We didn't know you were here, suh," he said, "and we didn't come down for a fight. But I want to warn you that, in defying my authority as sheriff, you become a lawbreaker, and this thing will be settled."

"We'll let the land courts settle it," said Buffalo Bill.

"By the way," asked Pawnee, "where is old Porcupine right now? You must have seen him recently, and we haven't been able to locate him."

As a matter of fact, Johnson had not seen old Porcupine; that had been a lie out of whole cloth.

"If you want to see him, hunt him up yourself," he shouted. "I don't have to guide you to him."

"Because you can't," said Pawnee. "I'll give you a hundred dollars if you'll show us where that Ute is, right now."

"Don't talk!" snarled Johnson.

"You don't know where he is yourself, eh? I thought so."

"I'll exhibit him when it's time to prove that I bought this placer claim of him," said Johnson.

He disliked to ride away—disliked to back down; but he knew that, if it came to a fight, he and his dozen men were not the equals of the men who now faced him on the other side of the stream.

But he went away fuming and threatening.

CHAPTER II.

A CHANGE.

Nothing could have been more noticeable than the change in the manner of Tybee Johnson, when Buffalo Bill and his friends went back to the town. His old courteousness had returned.

"Suh," he said, as the scout dismounted before the door of the Silver Nugget, "I must ask yo' pardon for my seeming discourtesy this morning. I wasn't just myself, suh."

He put out his hand, but the scout affected not to see it.

"That's all right, Johnson," was the answer. "He laughs best who laughs last, you know."

"As my guest here"—Johnson was proprietor of the hotel at which the scout was stopping—"you were entitled to proper treatment, suh, and I didn't give it. We'll step into the barroom, suh, drink our mutual healths across the bloody chasm, and forget that it ever existed."

"You're kind," responded the scout, with a mental reservation; "but we shall have to ask to be excused. We make it a point never to touch liquor when we have important business ahead of us."

"But with this cruel wah at an end," urged Johnson, a queer light flickering in his shiny dark eyes, "that business comes to an end, so far as I am concerned, suh."

But the scout refused again, and went on into the hotel, and to his room on the second floor. He soon was followed by the members of his party.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Pawnee, as he tossed his Stetson into a chair and took his seat in another.

"Ware, Mr. Johnson," said Nomad, drawing out his black brier and loading it for a smoke. "Thar aire snakes, like the rattlers, thet gives ample warnin' when they aire meanin' ter bite ye; an' other kinds thet aire plum' quiet. I likes ther rattler style ther best."

"Yoost der same," agreed the baron. "Misdar Yohnson iss see'ng dot he made a fools oof himselluf, unt so he iss now changed. Dot iss all. He iss der same Misdar Yohnson."

The scout got busy at his desk in the room, making out the papers which he was to file at the local land office to complete the preliminary steps to gain title to the placer claims they had staked that morning.

"Ve ar-re all goin to be rich as cheese—nit," said the baron. "I haf a blacer claim, unt so has Nomadt, unt all der odder vellers; budt idt ain'dt belong to us; idt iss belong to der Inchun girl. Ve are gidding rich fasdt—I don't t'ink."

"If we can keep these scoundrels here in the town from getting them, it's all I want," declared Pawnee.

"By the way, Pard Lillie," said the scout, "I wish you would slip down to the other hotel, where the hermit is stopping with his daughter, and have them come up here."

Pawnee Bill was gone about ten minutes.

There was a queer look in his face, when he returned.

"Deserted Jericho!" he exclaimed. "They're not in the town, so far as I can discover."

The scout, startled, wheeled around.

"No?" he said. "Where are they, then?"

"I don't know. They left that hotel early this morning, after paying their bills. The hotel keeper don't know where they went; but he said they had left the town."

"You didn't look elsewhere?"

"I thought I ought to jump back here with that information first."

"Waugh!" gulped Nomad. "Am I seein' the fine Eyetalian hand of Mr. Tybee Johnson in this hyar thing?"

"You can call me a greaser if it don't look it," said Pawnee.

"Vale, idt makes a liddle excidementd," drawled the baron. "Pefore I can gidt me any'ting to eadt, unt dry der vater oudt oof mine clodings, somet'ings else iss habben. I am going oudt to see vot iss der meanness, oof I can."

"Go back to the hotel, Lillie, and see if you can pick up the trail there. It may be that they merely have changed boarding places. And the rest of you—scatter out and make a search while I finish these papers."

They scattered out; and had not returned by the time the papers were finished. The scout stood ready to go over to the land office with them.

He waited until, one at a time, they came in, for he wanted their signatures to the papers, as well as to hear their reports.

They had discovered nothing. The girl and her father could not be traced after leaving the hotel.

"I found out that they went very early," said Pawnee. "There is a stage for San Juan that goes at five o'clock. That's about the time they left; but at the stage stable it's said no one went out on that stage. The old fellow and his daughter paid their bill, walked out of the hotel somewhere round five o'clock, and disappeared."

Buffalo Bill went over to the land office with his friends; and there, after the papers were properly signed and attested, they were filed.

The filing clerk looked them over curiously.

"Going into the mining business, I see," he said, with

uplifted eyebrows. "A new deal for Buffalo Bill, isn't it?"

He made a few entries on a slip of paper before him, and the scout and his friends went out.

"There is another stage for San Juan at noon," said Buffalo Bill, "and I'm going to run over to San Juan in it. We have got a lot of San Juan gold dust in the vault of the bank here, and I want to ask the men in authority at the San Juan mine what to do with it, as I got no answer from the telegram I sent them."

"That dust came near costing you your life," objected Pawnee, "and I don't think you are called on to trouble about it further. It's here in the bank vault, and ought to be safe. You kept the road agents from getting it, then stored it here; and you aren't called on to do any more. Let them look out for it themselves."

"But I want to have a look at the works over there, and particularly the men, for you'll remember that we thought it suspicious that news of a shipment of dust from there always seemed to be known to the outlaw gang in Silver Bow. While I'm gone, I'd like to have you continue your investigations. Locate the girl and her father, if you can. Also, I'm hoping you can get on the track of information that will enable me to land Mr. Tybee Johnson."

"Just now we've got a whole handful of suspicions about Johnson, and some half proofs, with a lot of guesses that ought to come near being true, yet nothing worth talking about that could be brought against him, if he was hauled before a court," said Pawnee.

"Just so," the scout admitted. "Maybe you can corral some of the evidence we need, while I'm at work over in San Juan."

The scout started on the stage that left at noon, and was in San Juan at four o'clock.

One of the first persons he saw there, as he got out of the stage, was Mark Merrill.

The scout postponed his intention of going to the office of the superintendent of the San Juan reduction works, and walked across the street to see Merrill.

"Hello!" he said. "You've given us heart disease to-day, Merrill. The amount of energy we have wasted over in Silver Bow hunting for you and your daughter might have been turned to better use."

The white-haired man, who was known as "the hermit" turned, stared, then extended his hand.

"Why, it's Cody!" he said. "And you're jest the man I want to see."

"You heard what I said? We've been hunting all over Silver Bow for you and your daughter."

"Cody, she's gone!"

"Your daughter?"

"Yes. And, because of her disappearance, I was never so glad to see anybody in my life as I am to see you right now."

"Tell me all about it," said the scout.

He pulled Merrill into an alley, so that their conversation might not be overheard.

"That's all I can tell you," said Merrill helplessly. "She's gone!"

He was a white-haired, pathetic little man in appearance. One never would have guessed his red record from his looks. But, until recently, he had been the implacable murderous slayer of Utes, lying for them in ambush and shooting them down without mercy. His unrelenting persecution of the Indians had been based on the fact that the Utes, in the Meeker massacre, had slain his wife, destroyed his house, and carried into captivity his infant daughter. The tragedy had upset his mind, and made him the unforgiving foe of old Porcupine and his band.

When the scout now asked the particulars of the disappearance of Merrill's daughter, they were given; yet, as he said, Merrill seemed to know nothing.

"I was afraid to stay with Olive in Silver Bow," he said. "Tybee Johnson and his crowd stood ready to murder me, simply because they thought I stood in with you. And, with old Porcupine's Utes rovin' round outside the town, I knew it wasn't safe to leave the streets a minute. So I had a talk with Olive and decided to come here. It's some distance from Silver Bow, and I thought maybe we could stay here in peace until you had thrashed out that matter with Johnson, and the Utes had been moved out of the county or killed. I didn't want to go clean out of the country, and Olive didn't, on account of that placer, which you said you was going to take up in such a way that Olive could have it. That was kind of you, to think of that, Cody; but I believe it lays back of this trouble here. Olive disappeared after we reached San Juan. We went to a hotel. I'll take you to it as soon as you'd like to go. Then she went out to do a little shopping. She was tired of the Indian clothes she'd been wearing, and she said she wanted something to wear different from an Indian blanket. So I let her go.

"Well, she never came back!

"She dropped out of sight right here! That's the way of it, Cody."

"You've made a search?"

"Couldn't have hunted for a needle in a haystack more close than I have hunted for Olive. I've been to all the stores where it seemed likely she had gone. I've been to the town marshal, and I've looked everywhere."

His trembling voice broke, and the scout thought the hermit was about to give way to grief. But he braced up again.

"Now, I'm comin' to what I meant to say. I stated that I thought that placer claim was at the bottom of it, or something like that. You see, Johnson wanted that placer. I knowed you was going to get ahead of him. And I reckon he found out the same. But if he held my daughter, he'd have a club with which he could break both our heads. That's what I mean. He could bring us to time. He'd say, 'I've got Olive; you've got the placer. Make that property over to me, and you can have her. Otherwise——'"

He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in a deprecatory manner.

"I think that's the size of it, Cody," he went on. "Johnson found out we was comin' to San Juan. He sent word to some of his friends here, and when Olive meandered out to look for a pretty dress and bonnet and so forth, she fell into the hands of them men. Otherwise, I can't account for her disappearance."

"I'm afraid you're right," Buffalo Bill admitted, touched with sympathy for Merrill and fear for Olive.

"You see," continued Merrill, "there's a telegraph line from Silver Bow to this point, and it'd be easy, that way, for Johnson to notify his men here, and that he has men in San Juan I don't doubt a minute."

"But your suspicions haven't been drawn to any particular men here?"

"Well, yes; but not in jest that way. I want to warn you against the superintendent of the San Juan mines. I went to his office, when I was hustling round looking for Olive. He seemed mightily interested in knowin' what you and your crowd was doin', and he asked me more'n a dozen questions."

"Ah!" said the scout. "Tell me about that."

"Well, you know that the San Juan mine has been shippin' a lot of gold over the trail, and that the road agents have been goblin' it. You saved the last load he sent through, and he began by inquiren' about that."

"To have a talk with him about that is what brought me here," the scout confided. "The gold is in the bank vault at Silver Bow now."

"I know it. Well, you just watch him, when you talk with him. He's slippery and he's crooked. I think he is in with Johnson's gang. That's a pretty mess, Cody. Here is Johnson, sheriff of the county, at the head of the road agents, as we're both convinced. And here is this San Juan mine superintendent in with them, according to my belief; sending out word to the agents when he gets ready to ship out a load of gold, so that they can rake it in."

"Thank you for that suggestion," said the scout. "If it should turn out that even the superintendent of the mine is in with the outlaws, the stockholders of this San Juan gold mine haven't much of a show to ever see any dividends."

"Look out for the stage drivers," warned Merrill, "they're likely to be in with the agents, too; in fact, you can't trust anybody. And if you don't keep your eyes open, you'll disappear, just as my daughter has."

"You don't feel that they have harmed her?"

"I'm hoping not. I think they are holding her, and when they think the time has come they'll show their hand, and offer to exchange her for that placer you are trying to take and hold for her. But I want your help, Cody."

"You shall have it."

"It gives me heart to know it," said Merrill, his voice again breaking. "You and your men will find her, if it can be done. And jest recollect that I'm on the job with you, when it comes to bucking against Johnson's outfit."

"Where is the telegraph office?"

"In the mine building—the last place you'd look for it."

"A private line?"

"I reckon it is, in a way; but it takes public messages. I warn you, though, that if you send anything over it, you'd better send it in cipher, if you ain't willin' for your enemies to know what you're sendin'."

Buffalo Bill promised to institute a search for Olive Merrill, the hermit's missing daughter, and went on to the office of the San Juan mine. The disappearance of the girl worried him. Like Merrill, he felt sure that the hand of Tybee Johnson was back of it.

CHAPTER III.

A BLOW AT THE SCOUT.

Buffalo Bill soon arrived at the office of the mine superintendent. The superintendent, whose name was Gilfillan, was rotund and smooth-faced, but with a watchful manner at variance with his oily speech. He thanked the scout, in many words, for his bravery in saving the latest consignment of gold dust from the "raiding hands of the outlaws of the trail."

"Your visit here to-day is fortunate, too," he added; "for to-night we have planned to send out another consignment of gold. We have every reason to believe that the road agents have no knowledge of our intentions; yet if, as you say, you are to return to Silver Bow to-night, and you can go in that stage, I shall consider that the safe transit of the gold is assured, to a point beyond Silver Bow."

The great scout studied Gilfillan, while turning over in his mind a reply.

"I'll go," he said at length.

"We will be willing even to make it worth your while," said Gilfillan, his round face beaming and his eyes narrowing to slits in their beds of adipose. "Name what you think would be a proper remuneration, and a check for that amount will be drawn for you. In fact, if we could employ you to act as a regular guard on our gold stages we should consider the sum so spent a good investment."

The scout refused to accept anything.

"I may, in the end, conclude not to go on that stage," he hedged; "for I've a good deal of work to do here in San Juan."

"But if you get your work done, you will go?"

"Yes."

"That's satisfactory. If you can't go, we will hold the stage until you can."

"There is no means, so far as you know, by which the road agents get advance information of when one of your treasure stages is to set forth?" the scout asked, his eyes lingering on the face of the superintendent.

"Absolutely no way."

"How do you account for the fact that your stages are lately held up so regularly? It indicates a leak of information."

"Nearly all stages have been held up lately; but we have been able to slip through one now and then."

"If I may suggest, wouldn't it be a good idea if a band of reliable armed men was sent out with each?"

"We have considered that, and abandoned it. If we had such a band, we would have just that many men in the secret of when the stage is to start. And how could we know that one of them, if not more, was not a road agent, or in the pay of the road agents?"

"It might be difficult, unless you knew your men. But I think I could furnish such an escort."

"You would use your own force?"

"I would."

"That might be excellent—if your men were here. In lieu of them, I'm going to trust you to take that gold through alone. I anticipate no trouble whatever—for the stage will start unheralded; but if a holdup should come, with you in the stage, the road agents would have an unhappy time."

As Gilfillan smiled, saying this, a flush stole into the scout's cheeks. He had a feeling that the mine superintendent was guying him.

"I'll tell you this evening whether I can go or not," Buffalo Bill promised as he went out.

All that day, as he conducted a search for the missing girl in San Juan, the scout had in mind that queer smile, and he kept asking himself what it meant.

The hermit helped him in the search, and warned him that Gilfillan would play crooked.

"I'm so certain of it, Cody," he declared, "that if you say you are going in that stage, I go, too."

"To help me fight the road agents?"

"You'll need help, if they appear," said Merrill emphatically; "don't ever doubt it. But what I'm going for is to continue my search for my daughter in Silver Bow; for the feeling is growing in me that she was captured here and taken back to that town."

"I hadn't thought of it, but it may be so," the scout confessed.

"You remember that fortune teller, who calls herself Madame Le Blanc?"

"I remember her well. She pretended to tell the fortune of Baron Von Schnitzenhauser, and put him wise about many things concerning Tybee Johnson, whom she hates as she does poison. I'm hoping to learn something more about Johnson from her."

"Well, I thought of consulting her. She knows everything. And she has been interested in my girl."

"She knows many things, but not through her fortune telling."

"Yes, through her fortune telling—in this way: Men and women go to her to get their fortunes told and they tell her a lot of things, while she is pretending to read their future. She has a way of worming out information. So it's occurred to me that if Johnson or some of his gang are holding my girl, news of it may come to Madame Le Blanc."

About six o'clock that evening the scout sent word to Gilfillan that he would take the stage that night for Silver Bow. As this information went in a sealed

letter, and an answer came back from Gilfillan in the same way, acknowledging its receipt, he had as good evidence as he wanted that if news of his intention got out it would be because Gilfillan was treacherous, or because it leaked out through Merrill. And he had, so far, been given no reason to believe that Merrill was otherwise than strictly honest.

The stage that night did not start from the stage station, but from a side street some distance away.

When the scout reached that little street, which was in darkness, he found the stage waiting for him, with the driver in his seat. Merrill was walking about nervously.

"All ready," said Merrill, in a low tone. "I hope you've got plenty of fighting hardware on you."

"You've talked with the driver?"

"You can't tell by talking with a man whether he's straight or not. The thing you ought to have done would have been to hang round the telegraph instrument and see if word didn't go over the line to Silver Bow about this. I'm bettin' it did."

The driver seemed surly and taciturn, when the scout spoke to him.

"I ain't likin' this job none," he grunted. "They told me this mornin' I wasn't goin' to have no passengers; and hyar I've got two."

"What's your objection to passengers?" the scout asked.

"Passengers aire li'ble to fight if there comes a holdup, and so I'm in line for gittin' shot; while, if thar ain't any passengers, all I have to do is to stick up my hands when ordered, and set safe in my seat. A man's a fool that will fight with road agents for a lot of stuff that don't belong to him."

He was still grumbling when he cracked his whip, and the stage rolled on toward the Silver Bow trail.

But there was one thing the scout noted, as this start was made, and this discovery he mentioned to Merrill.

A man who seemed to have been concealed in the shadows near by set out in the direction of the mining buildings as soon as the wheels were rolling.

"Oh, I saw it," said Merrill. "He was a spy, I bet you, and he is on his way now to tell Gilfillan that you're shore goin', so that Gilfillan can wire word of it. If this here stage don't meet with a holdup I'm goin' out of the guessin' business."

"Merrill, I'm taking this risk, not because I am so interested in saving the company's gold dust, as for the purpose of discovering if Gilfillan is the villain I begin to think he is. He, you, and myself are the only men in San Juan who can rightfully know that I intended to be a passenger to-night. Of course, I now add the stage driver; though, unless he was able to recognize me, he would have no means of knowing my identity."

"Any man seein' Buffalo Bill onct would know him when he clapped eyes on him the second time. And as for leakin', I didn't. I'd have no cause to. I'm standin' in with you, because I'm expectin' you to help me find my girl, and because I think you're the

fightin' kind, that will take this stage through, and I want to git to Silver Bow quick's I can."

The more the scout thought of it, as the stage bounced on, the more sure he became that word had been sent to Silver Bow and that the stage would be waylaid; the reason for the latter being the desire of Tybee Johnson's bunch to "put him out of the way."

It was characteristic of the scout that whenever he discovered or began to suspect strongly that his enemies were counting on a belief that he would do a certain thing, he did the opposite.

"I know this trail, Merrill," he announced, in a low tone, "and if there is a holdup it is more likely to come at Dead Man's Gulch than elsewhere."

"That place shore furnishes a stage settin' fit fer molodramer—high rocks on both sides, with the trail windin' like a cañon between 'em."

"I see you know the place, Merrill. If a holdup comes there, the passengers have a mighty poor show for their white alley. The agents come in front and jump in behind, and on each side are the cliffs, so they're hemmed in all round."

"It'd take a bird to git out o' there then, an' I shore ain't got no wings. But, gin'rally, the holdups are pulled off farther along. Dead Man's Gulch ain't clost enough to Silver Bow. Them Silver Bow agents don't like too much wild night ridin'; so they're inclined to make their tackles closer to the town."

"When they are after gold only. But if they come for me to-night it will be my life they're striking for; and they'll want to get me in a tight place, like that gulch. That's the way I'm figuring it now, Merrill."

"You may be right, Cody. I reckon you are."

"Before we get to the gulch we shall pass through a stretch of firs. The trail is dark there. What do you say if we open the door softly before we reach those firs; then drop out quietly after we are in them, and let the stage go on? We could follow it, and if it was brought to a stop in Dead Man's Gulch we'd know it."

"Then what? It'd make us safe, though. But we'd still be a mighty long ways from Silver Bow."

"I'd have proved to my own satisfaction that Gilfillan is a traitor to the men who employ him. And we could have the sweet assurance of knowing that we were still in the land of the living."

Merrill rubbed his chin reflectively and stared out of the stage window on his side.

"About another mile will bring us to them firs. I reckon, Cody, it's the thing to do. The man that don't fight, and runs away, may live to fight another day; and it's the future I'm thinkin' about. It's a deal better for me to have to walk to Silver Bow than to be lugged in there dead, and a lot better for my daughter. She's a-goin' to need me."

The scout opened the door softly on his side and dropped out, as the firs were reached. Merrill, slower and clumsier, was still fingering with his door as the stage was jerked on.

Then the unexpected happened.

Apparently, the road agents had followed the line of the scout's reasoning, and had set their trap in the firs. For as the stage swung on, with Merrill still in it, the command of "Hands up!" was shouted.

There was a roar of grinding wheels and clattering hoofs as the stage was drawn to a sudden halt, and the scout slipped into the firs at the side of the trail under cover of the noise.

At the same instant the door of the stage slammed, and it was apparent that Merrill had jumped to the ground.

This was followed by a cry of "Halt!" and a revolver shot.

Peering from his screen of firs, the scout dimly saw the horsemen surrounding the stage. They were half a dozen or more in number, with a few men on foot.

"Come out o' that!" was bellowed at the stage—a command emphasized with angry exclamations and a clicking of revolvers.

"They think I'm in there," muttered the scout. "This is sure proof that Gilfillan wired word ahead. Well, that much is settled. But I wonder what has happened to Merrill?"

This last seemed answered by exclamations from men farther on; but the scout could not tell whether Merrill was still alive and trying to escape, or had been shot down.

"Come out o' there, Buffalo Bill!" was yelled at the stage.

One of the horsemen rode up to the stage door, swinging his revolver.

"Better surrender!" he cried; "for if you try any monkey-doodle bizness you'll shore be shot to pieces the next minute. Come out and show yerself."

The silence vexed them.

"How's this, Wilson?" was shouted to the driver. "Buffalo Bill is in there, ain't he?"

"Shore he is," the driver asserted.

"You had two passengers, and one was Buffalo Bill?"

"That's right. He's in there. Better look out for him, though."

When the scout did not appear in answer to their commands, they clustered round the stage, with weapons ready, while the horseman who had ridden up to the door swung it open.

Having done that, he struck a match and flung it in.

A roar of astonishment and rage followed, when it was seen that the stage was empty.

"What's the meanin' of this, Wilson?" was roared.

"I'm ready to swear that he was there not five minutes ago," said the driver; "I was listenin', and heard them two passengers talkin'."

"Scatter out and look for him," was the loud order.

Some of the horsemen came charging along the trail, brushing past the scout, who stood back in the fire and saw them plunge by. They were followed by men on foot.

Still others ran ahead of the stage, as if they were interested in the other man who had been in it.

As one of the men on foot swept by, the scout recognized him as Hank Sims, a scoundrel for whom he could have no liking; for, less than a week before, Sims had deliberately tried to assassinate him in the streets of Silver Bow, jumping out of a gambling room and firing upon him almost point-blank.

Nothing had been done with Sims for that outrage. Tybee Johnson, his friend, claiming that Sims was drunk and didn't know what he was doing, had refused to arrest him; and, for the time, the scout had let the matter pass.

But he had not forgotten Hank Sims.

"Sims is still trying to get me," was his grim thought. "And that he is with this gang of thugs is sure proof that Johnson is backing them."

That he would have been foully murdered if caught in the stage the scout had not a doubt.

The road agents, accepting the statement of the driver, were so sure that Buffalo Bill was close at hand and hiding, that they began to beat about in the firs. They even boldly brought out and lighted lanterns, to assist them in this work.

Some of the outlaws were still roaring round the stage, and seemed inclined to hold the driver responsible for Buffalo Bill's escape. What the scout overheard of that talk made him sure the driver was also a member of the band, or in sympathy with it.

Backing away from the trail, when the search of the firs began, Buffalo Bill was trying to get round, so that he could come close to the trail ahead of the stage and discover what had befallen Merrill, when he was suddenly confronted by a man who had heard him coming, and, dropping down, had laid for him.

A rope shot from this man's hand.

The scout knocked the noose aside, and flashed through the gloom at his antagonist with a panther leap.

His springing jump and the impact knocked the man down; the next moment the scout's sinewy fingers were playing with the muscles of the rascal's throat.

"What's the row over there?" was shouted, for the noise had been heard.

The scout's assailant was wheezing weakly from the pressure on his windpipe. When the fellow relaxed and slid downward with sagging muscles, the scout picked him up deliberately and began to get back farther, carrying the man in his arms.

The scoundrel recovered enough, in a minute, to gasp a choky question, and the scout discovered that he had captured Hank Sims.

But he was being followed by men who could move faster because they were unburdened. So he put Sims down, and stood at bay with drawn revolver.

"If you speak," he whispered, "I'll put a bullet into you. I'm going to hold you, for I want a talk with you."

Before dropping Sims to the ground, he had, as he thought, taken all of Sims' weapons. But now he discovered his mistake. A revolver flashed almost under his nose. So close was it that the flare of the fire and

the powder smoke were blown into his face. He fell back, with the feeling that he had been hit, and heard Sims scrambling off before he could recover.

A shower of bullets coming at him, the scout dropped down, and began to crawl away.

"He's there!" was yelled. "Rake the bushes, boys, and you'll get him!"

Another shower of lead came through the darkness.

Buffalo Bill did not fire back, for he did not want to guide their aim. He crawled on, keeping close to the ground, and the bullets flew over him harmlessly.

It was a clever and successful retreat, but it took the scout so far from the stage trail that, before he could get back to it, the stage and the outlaws had gone on.

Anxious about the fate of Merrill, he came cautiously up through the firs. When he was sure the coast was clear, he began to make a search.

This search, covering an hour's time and much territory, revealed nothing, except that no body could be found.

But certain conclusions could be drawn, and the scout drew them.

It seemed unlikely that Merrill had been killed, or his body would have been left in or near the trail. The road agents would not have taken it to the town in the stage or on horseback.

If he had not been killed he had escaped, or had been held as a prisoner. Recalling Merrill's belief that his daughter was so held, it did not seem so unlikely that Tybee Johnson's friends would desire to hold the father. That would put in their hands another club with which to fight the scout for the possession of the placer.

It was a long walk to Silver Bow. But the scout was a good walker. And he set out, over the trail, when he had finished his search.

He had been given conclusive proof, that night, that the gang of thieves and thugs, who recognized the leadership of the sheriff of Ute County, was far-reaching in its membership, and stood ready to try any murderous method for his removal.

"My life isn't safe a minute, until I land Johnson and Sims in jail, with enough proof against them to send them over the road. But so far," he reflected, "I haven't that proof. I can't substantiate the claim that Johnson is at the head of these men. He wasn't with them, and I saw none of their faces. And as for Sims, I didn't see him; I only heard his voice."

Burdened with this lack of proof, together with his fight for the placer, and the search he felt he must make for Olive Merrill and for her father, if he was found missing, Buffalo Bill saw clearly that his dangerous work at Silver Bow was only beginning.

It was four o'clock in the morning when he reached the town. He went cautiously up to his room in the Silver Nugget.

He expected his coming would be looked for by Tybee Johnson, who was the proprietor of the hotel; but he met no one.

In his room, awaiting him and anxious, he found Pawnee Bill.

"Still safe, necarnis," was the pleased comment. "The stage came in before midnight. What have you been up against?"

Dropping into a chair, the scout detailed to his friend the events of the night.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME LE BLANC, THE SORCERESS.

The next day, while Buffalo Bill tried to get some sleep, with Nomad camped before the door of his room as a guard, Pawnee Bill, aided by the scout's faithful Piute, Little Cayuse, and by Baron Von Schnitzenhauser, tried to get track of Olive Merrill in the town, and learn the fate of Merrill himself.

One of the men whom Pawnee visited was Tybee Johnson.

Reasonably sure that Johnson knew everything, nothing was to be gained by any plan of concealment; and, though Pawnee did not expect that Johnson would admit knowledge, or make any truthful statement, there was always the chance that, by look or manner, he might disclose something worth while.

Johnson, in his own quarters at the Silver Nugget, knew that Buffalo Bill was in the house, and in his room, and that it was guarded by the watchful borderman. This he made no effort to conceal, as he sent for his colored boy, and ordered in a tray of "something cool, with ice in it."

Pawnee turned down the beverage offered.

"I always take a little snifter with friends, you know," said Johnson. "Sorry, suh, that you feel you have to disappoint me. But here's looking at you."

He filled and drained a glass.

"As for that placer, suh," he said, "and I suppose that is what you are here to talk about, I have definitely abandoned any present attempt to get it. Later, I may do something—in a legal way, I mean. But that, suh, being in the future, needn't come in to disturb our friendly relations now."

"You've heard, of course," said Pawnee, narrowly watching the sheriff, but without apparent effort, "that the stage from San Juan was held up again last night?"

"Yes, suh; the driver told that as soon as he came in. He was a mighty frightened man, suh. But one thing he reported I couldn't believe. He said that Buffalo Bill had been in the stage, and the agents were after him more than the gold. He also said that when the holdup was made it was found that Cody had jumped out just befo'. They had a so't of running fight with him, according to the driver, suh; but, as Cody is now in his room, and I presume all right, it's plain the agents didn't touch him."

"There was another passenger in that stage—Mark Merrill, otherwise known as the hermit," said Pawnee.

"Yes, suh, I heard that, too. He jumped out of the stage, and ran, and escaped; so the driver reported."

"The road agents got the gold?"

"Yes, suh; they collected it. Anyway, the driver didn't bring it in, and he says they took it."

"You've done nothing about it?"

"Yes, suh. I sent men out as soon as the driver made his report. They're still out."

"Merrill has not been reported in the town?"

"No, suh."

"I suppose you haven't any idea who any of those agents were, Johnson?"

"Not in the least, suh. If I did, I'd have them in jail before nightfall. This holdup business has got to stop, if I can stop it; but when I don't know who the scoundrels are, and can't find out, suh, what is there for me to do?"

"Apparently nothing."

"That's just it. I can't do a thing, suh."

"The girl is missing, too—the hermit's daughter," reported Pawnee, looking Johnson squarely in the eyes.

"Is that so, suh?" said the sheriff, filling his glass again, as if to cover his confusion. "I certainly hadn't heard it. When and where did that happen—if you have the particulars handy?"

"In San Juan, it's supposed; but, really, we don't know much about it. We're going to make a search for the girl, and for her father."

"I certainly wish you luck, suh," said Johnson, as if he meant it. "If I can help you by giving you a couple of my deputies, I'll be glad to do it. And any time, suh, when you or Cody want aid, if you'll let me know, I'll assist you all I can. That's what I'm here for, suh."

Pawnee Bill thanked him with quite as much suavity. But neither was deceived. Each had studied the other, and they came together and parted as sworn foes.

When the town of Silver Bow had been raked thoroughly, as it seemed, without dragging up so much as a scrap of information, Pawnee Bill set out with the baron to visit Madame Le Blanc. Her room was reached through a gaming hall, then through an alley, and up a flight of stairs. A card on the door proclaimed her wonderful powers as a fortune teller.

It was revealed by a red light, and if the card could be believed, she was not only a fortune teller, but a hypnotist and trance medium, with the added occult powers of a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter.

"Idt iss yoost as I seen idt when I vos here py der odder dimes," whispered the baron, reading the card. "Unt insite is anodder redt lambp, unt a white owl, mit a plack cat. Vhen der white owl stares adt you, unt der plack cat rups py your legs, you see der fortune teller."

The stuffed white owl was there; so was the black cat and the fortune teller.

"Five dollars," she said, when Pawnee dropped into the chair before her.

"Yoost like der odder dime," muttered the baron, still standing; "but, pefore I got me oudt oof der blace, idt cosdt me feefdeen tollars; yedt idt vos vort' idt."

On that previous occasion, to which the baron's mind returned, the fortune teller had given him valuable information, and proved herself an enemy of Tybee Johnson, who had wronged her, she claimed, for which cause she hated him heartily.

Pawnee Bill was bearing that in mind, when he opened up with:

"There's the five dollars; but I don't want a fortune told. What I'm seeking is some information that I hope you can furnish."

She had taken up her cards and was shuffling them.

"Yes?" she said, beginning to throw the cards out into little piles.

"You were much interested in the hermit's daughter."

"She is a dear girl!" said the fortune teller, lifting her painted face and giving Pawnee an inquiring stare.

"She is now missing."

Madame Le Blanc picked up one of the card piles, spread the cards fan-shaped in her hand, and looked at them.

"Yes, that's what the cards say," she declared.

"Perhaps, then," said Pawnee, smiling, "the cards will enable you to determine where we can find her."

She slipped the bits of pasteboard through her fingers.

"You haven't any idea where she is yourself?" she asked. "If you have, there is no use of my looking here."

"I thought you might tell me what you know, if any-thing," Pawnee urged.

"I know nothing, only as the cards tell me."

"What do they tell you?"

"You don't know anything yourself?"

"Not a thing; that's why I am here."

She looked at him again, with that intent gaze that made him feel that she was looking past his eyes, or through them, into the back of his head.

Then she picked up another pile of cards.

"Ah!" she said, breathing heavily. "Here it is."

The baron, seeming much interested, tiptoed nearer, and tried to crane his short neck to look at the cards the woman held.

"The Utes have her," she announced.

"You seen dot in der cards?" the baron exploded.

She laughed nervously.

"I haven't seen *your* money yet," she reminded.

"You hadt a kveen oof hearts, der king oof spates, unt some tiamondts. Dot vos all. I seen idt."

"Well, isn't that enough?" she demanded. "The girl is the queen of hearts, the old Ute chief is the king of spades, and that placer mine out in the Perdis-das is represented by the diamonds. Isn't that plain enough? But, remember, I'm not talking to you now, but to this other gentleman."

"Go on," urged Pawnee. "The Utes have got her. But you only know it from the cards?"

"They never fail me," she declared. "The Utes have captured the girl."

She took up another pile of cards.

"Yes, it's as I thought. They are holding her, thinking if they do they can get that placer."

"Do you see anything there about her father?" asked Pawnee, not believing in the cards, but believing in the possible knowledge of the woman.

She arched her painted brows.

"Oh, he is missing, too? Yes, here it is, all plain enough."

"Perhaps the Utes have him, too?" said Pawnee, in a tone of skepticism.

"That's right; you're a good guesser. The Utes have him, too; and they are holding him for the same reason that they're holding her. You see, the Utes were working that placer, even though it is claimed by you and your friends. I believe that she was the one who discovered it, and, naturally, they will not be willing to surrender it. So they intend to force Buffalo Bill to give it to them, and no doubt they will desire to exchange the girl and her father for it."

"Go on," said Pawnee again.

"That's all there is about her; but I can tell you something about yourself."

"That's good. I'll receive all kinds of bouquets now."

His light manner did not please her. She frowned and bit her lip.

"I can see only bad," she declared, as she consulted her cards, "if you go on in the route you have chosen."

"I suppose I'll have to change it."

"You are to be killed soon—if you stay in Silver Bow."

"Wow! Then I'll have to get out."

"I'm afraid you won't do that, and that you'll be killed. These cards look ominous, Major Lillie, I assure you. If I had any influence with you, I'd advise you to leave Silver Bow at once. But, of course, you won't."

She shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly.

"This sudden and undesirable taking off—how is it to occur?" said Pawnee. "If I can know that in advance, perhaps it won't occur."

"By a bullet; that's all I can tell you."

"Vare iss dot pullet?" broke in the baron, leaning over again and looking at her fan of cards.

"That ace of spades, standing as it does in relation to the cards about it—right after it, you see, is the ace of diamonds, indicative of a coffin. Before it is the king of spades, standing for the man who is to fire the bullet. The king of spades stands for a dark man."

"He iss to be shot py a nigger, huh?"

"By an Indian, I should say—or a dark-complected white man."

"Himmelblitzen! Dot iss awvul."

"I see that you and Major Lillie are inclined to treat this matter lightly," she said, with a flush that showed even under her rouge; "but it will be no funny matter when this killing happens."

"Then you think it will happen?" asked Pawnee.

"I do, unless you get out of the town at once."

"You don't find anything good in the cards about me

—no handsome sweetheart ambling my way, no treasure of diamonds, no——"

"Nothing," she said, her voice rising with irritation, "nothing but death for you, Pawnee Bill."

"And for this I have paid five good dollars," said Pawnee, assuming an expression of disgust.

"It will be worth your life, if you heed it."

CHAPTER V.

THE BARON'S ADVENTURE.

"The question rises," said Pawnee Bill, when reporting this to the scout, "as to whether this woman is as friendly to us as she has seemed to be."

"She claims to hate Tybee Johnson, and there is no doubt that she helped us before," Buffalo Bill reminded.

"I don't forget that, necarnis. Anyhow, she has given me fair warning to get out of the town."

"Which she'd ort ter know that you won't do, ontill some er these hyar troublin' matters aire settled," growled Nomad.

"Oh, yes, I'm going to get out of the town."

"Waugh! Ye aire? When, I wonder?"

"To-night. If Pard Bill seconds the idea, I'd like to take you and Little Cayuse, and rack out toward the Perdidas, and investigate that tip she gave, that Olive Merrill is a prisoner of the Utes."

"Me like to go pronto," Little Cayuse declared.

"Of course you're getting tired, son, of hanging round this town, and I don't blame you," said Pawnee.

"Piute like to git out where can smell the air," said the young Indian. "Too mucho no-good white man here—too many tinhorn—too many everything me no like."

"Waugh! I'm agreein' wi' ye!" Nomad grumbled. "This hyar lay ain't no ways to my notion."

Pawnee grinned.

"There ought to be danger enough here to suit you, old Diamond."

"Jumpin' sandhills! 'Tain't thet. Et's this hyar sleepin' in er hotel, an' w'arin' yer feet out on hot pavements, eatin' hotel grub, breathin' air all tainted up wi' coal smoke, an'——"

His voice dropped with a rumble, and he applied himself again to his pipe.

"That all the inventory?"

"Et's jest everything! Waugh! Me no cumtux."

"Same here, Little Cayuse," put in the Piute.

"Well, then, I can count on it that you'll go with me when I amble toward the Perdidas, which I'll do to-night, if Pard Bill consents."

"While you're gone," said the scout, "I'll rake the town over again, with the help of the baron. We ought to draw something, if his luck hits a winning streak."

"Der luckiness oof Schnitzenhauser iss on der bum ladelly."

"It doesn't seem to me that the hermit's daughter

can be in the hands of the Utes," the scout added. "Still, it's worth investigating. And there is the hermit, too. I've got to learn what happened to him. I haven't been able to sleep well to-day, for thinking of that old man."

Pawnee Bill did not set out for the Perdidas until he had the shield of darkness for himself and his companions, and he stole away with them as if bent on some purpose of evil.

Buffalo Bill and the baron went out into the streets of the town, where danger lurked for them on every corner.

But there was one thing making for safety on which they relied. Tybee Johnson and his thugs were not of the kind to strike openly. It is true that Hank Sims had once jumped into the street and shot at the scout, but he had been drunk, or was making a pretense that he was.

Dark alleys were therefore avoided, as the scout and the baron went along. Likewise, they kept out of pushing crowds, where an enemy might think it would be safe to drive a knife into one of them. Out in the open, under the flare of the gas lamps, and in well-lighted rooms, they felt immune.

But, at last, a man who brushed by the baron and entered a gambling house changed this plan.

"You seen him?" whispered the baron, with a tug at the scout's sleeve. "Dot iss der scamp dot once said 'Voosle.' Budt I hadt no luckiness in vollering him. Oof macaroni hadt peen selling adt a cent a mile——"

"Follow him," said the scout.

"Yah, I am idt," said the baron, as he hurried off in the wake of the man. "Budt oof my luckiness iss no petter as der odder dime, I couldt not make enough to buy me a bair oof shoe laces oof macaroni, oof idt vos selling vor a cent a mile. Budt here iss a gone-ness."

Tracking the man to the gambling place, he saw him disappear through a rear door. So the baron made for that door, and brought up in a dark alley beyond it.

Once before, having heard this man whisper "Wolseley," which the baron called "Voosle," Schnitzenhauser had followed into the alley; then had found his way to the fortune teller's above, and by her had been given information of importance; but he had missed his man, and considered that he was "unlucky."

Remembering now that the fortune teller had said there was another door in one of the blank walls of the alley, he felt along them in the darkness.

After a hunt of five minutes his hands touched the knob of a door.

"Voosle, Volesley," said the baron, scratching the door.

To his amazement it opened.

"That's not the password to-night," said a man, whom he saw dimly in the doorway. "You'll have to——"

The baron, catapulting against him, knocked him aside, and the next moment was running on, not knowing where he was going, but with the idea that he was likely to break his head, if not his neck.

The man shouted something, banged the door, and the baron heard him following.

"I ton'dt know vare I am, budt I am here," the baron whispered, as he hurried on.

The flashing of a light from a room ahead of him, and the sound of voices there, made grateful to the baron his discovery that on his right was a passage.

There was a velvet curtain or hanging of some sort, and a door which was not locked. The baron stood ready to ram the door, to get through it, when it yielded to him, and he stumbled into a black passage.

The doorkeeper who had followed whisked by, and the baron heard him asking questions, apparently of the men whose voices had helped to turn the baron aside.

"Oof vun keeb going," muttered the baron, "he iss on der road."

His toe stubbed against the bottom step of a flight of stairs.

The next instant the baron was softly ascending.

"Oof dhis iss Voosle, der acquaintance mit him ain'dt going to bay me mooch," he was thinking, when he reached the top of the stairs, and a curtain brushed his face.

It was like the curtain below. Behind it was another door, closed, but not locked. Beyond the door was a room, that held an odor like sachet powder.

"Der fortune teller she haf been burning sweet smoke in here, too," was the baron's thought, as he paused on the threshold to listen.

The querulous inquiries of the doorkeeper who had chased him had died out, but somewhere behind him was a stir that made him think he was being pursued.

"Der broper t'ing vor me to do right now iss to findt some vay to der streedt, unt make a skib outd before I am kilt."

Still, that was not the baron's way. He wanted to investigate the Sons of Rest, the mysterious secret organization composed of thieves and road agents, of which Tybee Johnson was supposed to be the head. It was now his intention, if he could find a hiding place, to remain concealed until after the search for him stopped, then creep back and continue his investigations.

Hence, instead of searching for a way of getting safely down to the street, Baron Von Schnitzenhauser continued his search for a hiding place.

"Varefer idt iss I ton'dt know idt, budt I am here, unt oof I can findt me a safeness——"

Moving quietly into the room, his knees butted against something soft. This he discovered to be a lounge, that had over it a fringed covering which hung down to the floor.

"Yoost der t'ing!"

The baron dropped down, and was investigating the depths beneath the lounge when he heard some one coming, and squeezed under without more ado.

He had no more than concealed himself and drawn his revolver for emergencies when the footsteps entered the room—footsteps that were soft and gliding.

with a slippery movement that made him think he had been spotted and followed and was being looked for.

But a light flashed instantly—a red light, that threw a few streaks of gory color under the lounge where he lay; and the baron saw that he had entered the room of the fortune teller.

"Yiminidy grickets!" he breathed, fairly paralyzed. "How dit I dood idt? I am adt der odder endt oof der puiliding!"

For a moment he was so confused he could not think clearly. Of course, in striking the stairway he had been turned round, and had arrived at this room, while thinking he was moving in the opposite direction.

A further sense of confusion was caused by the discovery that the room of the fortune teller plainly connected with the lower hall that led directly to the secret lodge rooms of the Sons of Rest.

Madame Le Blanc had set the red lamp on its shelf and was moving about the room. The baron could see only her shadow, now and then, but he had no doubt as to her identity.

That feeling of confusion persisting, he pinched himself, to make sure he was not dreaming.

"Somedimes vhen I feel so, der nightdmare iss ridting me unt I am having treams. Budt I haf hadt no peer to-nightd unt no sissage! So I musdt be awake."

He was almost on the point of crawling from under the lounge and revealing himself, when he heard feet on the stairs by which he had ascended.

"Der doorkeeber vot chased me iss coming oop to gidt his fordune toldt, so dot he can know vare I am. Vale, oof she can seen me t'rough dhis lounge, unt tell apoudt idt——"

The door on the stairway opened, and the voice of Tybee Johnson sounded:

"Did a man pass through this room a while ago?"

"No," the woman answered.

"You're sure of it?"

"He couldn't have got through without being seen by my man below," she declared. "Some one came up this way?"

Johnson came on into the room.

"Well, it's a funny thing. Some one who had last week's password got by the guard and into the hall. The guard came into the lodge room asking about it. He had followed the man to the lodge room, but no one in there had given last week's password. So we thought the fellow might have come up this way and got down to the street."

Going to her front door, which opened into the red-lighted hall, Madame Le Blanc called a question down to her doorkeeper.

The baron heard the doorkeeper's answer, declaring that no one had passed him recently.

"Yiminidy! I am now in a closeness!" thought the baron. "Oof I am bulled oudt oof here py my headt unt my heels, somepoty is going to gidt hurt."

After going to the rear door, by which he and the baron had entered, and shouting to some one at the

foot of the stairs that the man being searched for had not passed through the madame's room, Tybee Johnson came back into it.

"One of the boys must have been lying," he said. "Queer ideas they have of a joke, sometimes. No one not a member could have had even last week's password."

"I don't know about that," said the woman.

She dropped into her chair behind the card-covered table.

"Last week Baron Von Schnitzenhauser got hold of it. He came up here asking me what it meant."

Johnson sat down in the chair on the other side of the table.

"How'd that happen, I wonder?"

"One of your men was fool enough to whisper the word to another member, down in the gaming room, and the baron, who happened to be standing by, heard it."

"You threw him off the scent, I hope?"

"I'm not sure that I did."

"That thick head would never tumble, unless you put him wise," said Johnson.

"Dot t'ick headt!" muttered the baron. "Some dime I am going to bay you for dot."

"I hope you didn't," Johnson went on uneasily. "We were at outs then, and you're a spiteful cat sometimes."

"What I told him was that the Sons of Rest was a society like the Odd Fellows, and it might be he had heard their password. I am a spiteful cat at times, and we weren't as sweet as honey toward each other right then."

"Oh, I know you were trying to help Buffalo Bill against me," Johnson declared, in no pleasant tone.

"And you made a lot of trouble."

"That's why you came back, and want to be good now! I thought as much. You'd rather have me on your side than against you."

"That's no joke," he admitted; "but it isn't the reason I came back. We can't get along without each other, you know. You're the only woman in the world for me, and that's a fact."

"Some sveetheartd pitzness now," mumbled the baron. "Idt iss gif me a sickness by my sdomach!"

A good deal of the "sweetheart business" followed. To his amazement the baron discovered that this woman was, or had been, Tybee Johnson's wife. They had quarreled and separated and been bitter enemies, now they had made up and were again friends.

"Unt dot means danger for Puffalo Pill unt der resdt oof us, vhide ve ar-re peliefing vot she iss say to us."

Proof of the correctness of this view came immediately.

"The very fact that I was against you, and trying to help Buffalo Bill as a matter of revenge, will enable me now to undo all the harm I have done, and more," she urged. "Pawnee Bill was up here not long ago."

"Does he believe in fortune telling?"

"Certainly not. He was after information. That girl and her father have both disappeared, and he thought perhaps I had got some information about it. I told him they were held by the Utes, and sent him off to the Perdidas searching for them, for I supposed you had them, and didn't want a close search made here in the town."

"Well, we haven't," said Johnson, bringing his hand heavily down on the table. "And we don't know where they are."

"You don't? I jumped to the conclusion that you were holding them, to play them off on Buffalo Bill for the possession of that placer."

"The girl and her father got out of here hurriedly," said Johnson, "thinking they would be safer in San Juan. I wired about it in cipher to Gilfillan. But, before he could get busy over there, the girl had vanished. Her father was bawling about it through the streets, claiming he did not know what had become of her. Perhaps that was a bluff."

"Mercy me!" the woman exclaimed nervously.

"About that time Buffalo Bill set out for San Juan, perhaps to look for them there. He went on the stage, and that indicated he meant to come back on it. So we planned to trap him, in Dead Man's Gulch. Well, it worked out in the strangest way. Merrill started to return with him in the stage. The holdup was pulled off according to program, but Buffalo Bill wasn't in the stage when it was done, though Merrill was. Merrill jumped out and got away. And when a search along the trail was made, Buffalo Bill captured Hank Sims. You see, he was lying right there, close by, which showed he had jumped out of the stage, somehow, when it was halted, or just before."

"He captured Sims!"

"But he didn't hold him. And we didn't hold Buffalo Bill. It was an utter fiasco."

"He's here in the town!"

"I know it. Sims has lost his nerve, and so have the others. So Cody walks round, bold as you please."

The woman was silent a moment, as if thinking this over.

"Let me tell you one thing, Tybee," she said: "I'd rather have a band of wolves after me than the officers of the United States government. If you kill Buffalo Bill, and it can be proved against you, nothing can save you."

"Don't I know it?" he said uneasily.

"So you'll have to be careful."

"That's what's the matter with us now. We're so careful that we act scared. Every man jack of us is so sure that the shooting of Buffalo Bill or any of his men means hanging that we're afraid to move. Yet, if we don't down them, they'll get us sooner or later."

"Perhaps you had better get out of the town," she suggested.

"To run away would be a confession of guilt."

"Well, you want to be careful."

"If Pawnee Bill bumps into the Utes and gets done up by them——"

"You'd like it. That may happen, though he took Nomad and that Indian with him. But if you had some men down at the Perdidas disguised as Indians!"

"That might work," he said. "Yes, it's a bright idea. I'll attend to that. Let's see, when did they set out?"

"Shortly after dark."

"And they followed the mountain trail, of course. My Utes could meet them as they come back. I'd as soon lay that on the Utes as not. It would clear up more than just Pawnee and his bunch. It would put the Utes to flight, probably, and stop them from further claiming that placer."

"Do you think you can ever get that placer away from Buffalo Bill now? He's got the start of you."

Johnson laughed a bit triumphantly.

"If you should see the land-office records you'd discover that those claims have been filed on in the name of myself and others."

"But I thought Buffalo Bill got his papers in."

"He did. But they were lost somehow. Then I put mine in. The records don't show that he ever filed any papers."

"It's a good thing, Tybee, that you've got your scoundrels holding down positions everywhere."

"I've been working up this organization for five years," he declared proudly, "and the men who are in the gang can be found in about every place. I'll get that placer, all right, in the end, if Buffalo Bill can be pushed aside."

"He couldn't be bought off?"

"Never. That's been tried before, and the men who tried it didn't think well of the plan afterward."

"And the placer is very rich?" she asked.

"I think so. From what little investigation I've been able to make, it's worth more than the San Juan gold mine."

"We ought to have it," she said softly. "We must have it."

"It would be easy, if only Buffalo Bill was out of the way!"

She sat silent again, and, through habit, shuffled her cards. The baron could hear them slipping through her fingers, and the breathing of Tybee Johnson.

"Sooner or later," she said, "he will be up to see me—not because he believes in fortune telling, but he thinks I discover things in that way, and am disposed to aid him. That's what I meant, Tybee, when I said that our recent break, and the help I gave him because of it, have put it in my power now to help you as I never could have done otherwise."

"Perhaps so," he said doubtfully.

"Thinking that I dislike you and am disposed to help him, he will be likely to believe whatever I tell him."

"Maybe so."

"How would it do if I told him about the Sons of Rest? He knows what I said about them to the baron, and that would incline him to believe more."

Tybee Johnson shifted nervously in his chair.

"The closer we keep that whole business a secret the better, it seems to me," he urged.

"I can tell him the truth—that you meet on certain nights in those rooms, when men he would never suspect meet with you, and that there plans are laid and——"

"And have him jump in there with a lot of deputies, and capture the whole bunch!"

"You didn't let me finish. I fancy I foolishly told the baron enough to enable him to locate those rooms. So you'll have to meet the danger that Buffalo Bill will jump in there, anyhow."

"A woman's tongue!" growled Johnson.

"A woman who hates is always dangerous, you know! I thought I hated you, then, but now I want to help you. If you have got to get rid of Buffalo Bill, the only safe way is to make it seem it was done by a mob, or a gang of toughs. He has many enemies here. If he should lead his men into that alley—at the other end, where the secret door is, with the idea of raiding the place from that point, a gang of town thugs might rush on him and his men there and kill them. That's my idea. But I hate——"

"It might be done—with Sims to lead 'em."

"And you'd keep out of it?"

"I'd be somewhere else—in San Juan, maybe."

"Well, if Sims would do it the plan would work out. Still, I'm afraid for anybody to try it. But if Sims has the nerve——"

"Sims thinks he has got to get Cody's goat, or do a dance on air. You see, Sims killed a miner up in Fargo, a year ago, and he has got it in his head that Buffalo Bill is here looking for him. Though he has changed his name, and his looks, he thinks Cody has him spotted."

"And maybe he is right."

"Maybe he is; it wouldn't surprise me."

"Shiminidy!" thought the sweating baron, cowering beneath the stuffy lounge, where the heat began to be unendurable. "Efery minude vot I lif I am learning somedings. When Cody knows dot apoudt Sims, he vill squeeze dot willain until he iss ready to dell der whole troot apoudt Misder Yohnson. Der luckiness oof Schnitzenhauser she iss vaving again some more. Whoob!"

"You can put it up to Sims," continued Madame Le Blanc, "and see if he has the nerve. But I hate to suggest it."

"For why?"

"Oh, I don't know; it makes me feel queer. Ugh!"

"When Buffalo Bill comes here again, try to find out just what he is planning against us—against me. I'll give this tip to Sims. Then, if you conclude to send Cody and his bunch into that alley—say to-morrow night—perhaps something will happen. But we won't talk about it, if it gives you the shivers. Mum's the word, here and elsewhere. And, for goodness' sake, don't let your tongue run away with you, for Cody is sharp as tacks, and more suspicious than a rat before a trap."

"Cody iss nodt some fool, you pedt me!" thought the baron. "Unt me, I am some t'ick headt, eh? Petter you vatch a liddle oudt, Misder Yohnson."

Tybee Johnson and the woman talked longer, but covered much the same ground. Johnson wanted to send after Pawnee Bill a band of thugs who could play the Ute trick to perfection. And the thought of being able to get Sims to strike the scout a deadly blow allured him.

Still, ruled by caution, he had reached no definite decision when he left the room.

Yet the baron was sure that the plans would be carried out, so far as the road agents were able to carry them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BARON'S ESCAPE.

The departure of Johnson caused the black cat, that was the especial pet of its mistress, to dart in fear under the lounge.

Discovering the baron, though previously aware that he was there, caused the little beast to arch its back and spit angrily.

Thereupon Madame Le Blanc came over to the lounge, giving the baron a shiver of fear.

"What is it, Pluto?" she asked. "Is there a rat under the lounge?"

"Fairst I am a t'ick headt, unt now I am a rat! Himmelblitzen!"

The baron tried to lie snug and quiet, intending to remain there until the woman's departure from the room gave him a chance to escape. But the cat threatened his hasty undoing.

It spat at him again, gave him a rake on the shoulder, and backed away, though it did not depart.

"You're a foolish Pluto," said the woman; "there isn't anything there."

"Notting at all," breathed the baron. "Yoost you go away kvick."

But Madame Le Blanc stooped down to draw the cat from under the lounge, and, in doing so, put her hand on the baron's leg.

If she had been an ordinary woman she would have screamed, and, perhaps, would have run from the room. But, being of a very different order, she simply lifted the edge of the loose lounge covering enough to make sure she was not mistaken, and pulled out the cat.

Then she pitched it to the floor, and, moving to the head of the lounge, she drew from her bosom a revolver.

"Come out of there!" she commanded, cocking the weapon.

For a second the baron "sweat blood."

"Come out," she ordered, "or I shall shoot you where you are!"

But the momentary delay had given the baron time to think, and he now acted. He rose up under the lounge, lifting it bodily, and turned it over on its end,

with a push that smashed it against her and threw her down.

As the lounge fell with a crash, carrying Madame Le Blanc before it, her revolver was discharged. The baron caught away the lounge covering and drew it round his head and shoulders, so that it enveloped him, as it fell about him, from head to foot.

The next instant he was leaping toward the door which opened into the red-lighted hall.

Though dazed by her fall, Madame Le Blanc fired again, sending the bullet through the door panel not a foot from the baron's head. Then he crashed through the door, nearly tearing it from its hinges, and went down the stairs in a series of wild jumps that came near being his undoing, for the lounge covering caught and tripped his feet as he reached the bottom.

But it was as well that this happened. The lower door flew open, the knob turned by the doorkeeper, who had heard the shot and the crash; and the baron was hurled against him, so that both went through together, falling in the alley.

The baron fell on top, and the next instant he had wrapped the red lounge covering round the head of the doorkeeper, and was making tracks through the alley.

Instead of trying to escape through the gaming place, which he had used before, he looked for another way out, for he did not want to disclose his identity to any one in the gaming room, as he would surely do if he ran through it.

Behind him he heard the startled yells of the doorkeeper, and, farther off, the high-keyed voice of Madame Le Blanc.

"I ton'dt know vare I am going, budt I am on my vay!" he muttered, as he flew for safety, seeing ahead of him a dim light.

He fetched up in another short alley that had walls like a house. Two minutes later he was in a narrow street. Here he recognized his surroundings. Half a block away was the main street, brilliantly lighted, filled with night crowds, and lined with saloons and gambling houses.

Before reaching this street the baron stopped, and stepped into a doorway.

"I ton'dt vant to go on mit heavy pants. Somepody mightd dake me for a locomoteef, unt t'row der switch. So I vill yoost roosdt here a liddle vhide, so, I can gedt my lungs kvierter. Himmel! Dot vos an exciting in-experience. I am looking for oxcitemendt, unt I am gitting idt in punches."

As he rested he drew out his big pipe and jointed it together—a mean feat. He also got out his tobacco bag.

"Vhen I go aheadt I vill nodt haf der pants eeny more, unt vill be schmoking so kviet unt nice."

His big pipe was going, and he was walking slowly, as if he had been enjoying a stroll, when he came into the main street of the town. Here he passed boldly by the gambling house, edging his thick body through

the crowd, with an eye out for danger, and a hand thrust into his coat pocket, where a big revolver rested.

He would have given much for the clairvoyant power of seeing through the building into the regions occupied by Madame Le Blanc and her friends; but he pictured mentally what was going on there, and hit close to the truth.

Madame Le Blanc had come tumbling down the stairs, screeching to the doorkeeper not to let the man escape, and had run plump into the arms of the doorkeeper, who had gone in wild pursuit of the baron and then had run back again.

"Where is he?" she cried.

"I don't know. He got away. Who was it?"

"You let him get away?"

"Madame, he knocked me down, and fell on top of me, and he smothered me in this rag. I never——"

She snatched it away from him and held it up in the dim light.

"My lounge covering," she said. "He was hiding under the lounge in my room."

"Who was it? That Garry McKeown, I'll warrant. Three times, in the last two days, he has tried to get into these rooms. And he's the biggest thief in Silver Bow."

"Garry McKeown!"

"You've seen him—that fat slob that's always tryin' to pry into places and steal whatever he can lay his hands on. He stole ten dollars from the till of the saloon next door only yesterday. They saw him in there, and, after he went out, the money was gone. He'd steal the barroom furniture, if he could get away with it."

"Garry McKeown!"

"That's who I think it was. I was gone from the door here a few minutes, and he must have slipped in then. It was while you was out of your room up there. You can tell, maybe, if he got anything."

"I hope you're right, as to who it was. I'll look round and see if anything is missing."

When she got upstairs, with the lounge covering trailing over her arm, and turned higher the red lamp, she found the scared cat perched on top of the desk behind her chair, close by the stuffed white owl.

The contrast between the snowy owl with its staring glass eyes, and the black cat, arching its back in terror and ready to fly at her, caused her to laugh.

"You silly Pluto!" she said.

But when the cat scratched her, as she sought to take it, she knocked it to the floor.

As it scurried under the lounge again footsteps were heard at the door leading to the stairs that led to the rooms of the Sons of Rest.

"What's the row?" demanded Tybee Johnson, opening the door and entering.

"Why, there was a man under this lounge all the while we were talking!"

"No!"

"Pluto ran under there after you had gone, and, when I tried to get him, I discovered the man. I

ordered him out at the point of my revolver. Instead of crawling out, as I expected he would, he rose up and threw the lounge on me. I tried to shoot him as he ran out at the door over there, but he got away. Lofton says he thinks the fellow was Garry McKeown."

"I hope so. You didn't get to see him?"

Johnson dropped into a chair. His face looked suddenly pasty under the red light, and he was trembling.

"He threw the lounge on me, and knocked me down with it. Then, when he ran, he had that lounge covering round him, so I couldn't see who he was."

She picked up the cover from the chair where she had thrown it.

"I hope Lofton is right," the sheriff said. "But I can't forget that a man with last week's password tried to get into the lodge rooms, and he may have come this way when he was chased. If he did, and——"

"You're a nice, loving husband, you are, Tybee Johnson!"

"What's the matter now?" he demanded.

"You haven't asked whether I was hurt, or anything—after I had told you that the lounge was thrown on me and I was knocked by it to the floor. All you're thinking about is your own possible danger."

"It's enough to think about," he grumbled. "Were you hurt?"

"I don't think so—not much, anyway; though, at the moment, I thought I was half killed. Whoever it was under that lounge, he must have heard all we said, and you know what we were talking about. I think you'd better see Garry McKeown and find out if it was him."

"He wouldn't admit it. But I'll see him and accuse him of it, and maybe I can find out. If it was, I'll slip him a hundred dollars and tell him to keep still."

He got out of the chair heavily and walked round the room. The cat ran out of its hiding place, and he kicked at it.

"If it hadn't been for the cat I wouldn't have known the man was there," she urged.

"And if you hadn't lost your wits when you made the discovery you'd have kept quiet and slipped me word, and the fellow could have been captured."

"I was a fool, there," she admitted bitterly.

"But it's too late to talk about that. If that was one of Buffalo Bill's men——" He stopped in his walk. "Well, they'll be on, and you know what that means. We said enough to condemn both of us."

"Now, you're getting scared."

"I am—if it was one of Cody's men! But I'll see McKeown."

He went down by the front way, and had a talk with Lofton, the doorkeeper, after which he felt better, for Lofton, letting his imagination rove, was becoming more certain every minute that the man who had been in the fortune teller's room upstairs was the sneak thief, Garry McKeown.

In the main street outside, the baron was moving along slowly, making his way toward the Silver Nug-

get, where he expected to find Buffalo Bill. The placid manner with which he puffed at his big pipe gave no hint of the thoughts stirring in his shrewd German mind.

Tybee Johnson, hastening to the Silver Nugget, of which, as has been said, he was the proprietor, passed the slow-moving German, and flashed him a look.

"A fine nighdt, Misder Yohnson," said the baron.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTURED BY THE UTES.

Pawnee Bill, out in the Perdidas valley, had adventures of his own, though the time was a bit later.

It will be recalled that Pawnee had taken old Nick Nomad and Little Cayuse, and had started out in the night for the Perdidas, to try to discover if the missing girl, Olive Merrill, was with old Porcupine and his Utes; the tip on which he was working having been given by Madame Le Blanc.

But, while Pawnee was still resting in the belief that the fortune teller could be depended on to aid Buffalo Bill against Tybee Johnson, he was taking no chances, for Tybee had swarms of spies in Silver Bow, and the likelihood that men would be sent out to ambuscade his party was never absent from Pawnee's mind.

To guard against surprise, Pawnee and his followers deviated from the mountain trail, when they were no more than a mile or so beyond the town, and descended into the valley of the Perdidas by another way, as day was breaking.

From a hill they now took a look over the valley, searching it for signs of Ute occupancy.

"Them ki-yis, ye recklect," observed Nomad, "warn't nowhar round when we set them claim stakes. Tharfore, I reckon we can safe slide down an' see ef Johnson's gang has moved 'em."

"No see um Utes," said Little Cayuse, shading his eyes with his brown palm.

"Still, they may be there," declared Pawnee Bill. "But we'll go down and have a look."

They forded the river and descended on the farther side.

When they got down to the placer claim they found that the claim stakes had not only been moved, but that others had been set up instead.

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled. "Tybee Johnson has been at work hyar."

"Well, it won't do him any good. He can't take away men's rights in a mining claim by doing something wrong himself," Pawnee declared. "I'm no law sharp myself, old Diamond, but it doesn't take a lawyer to know that much."

"He can make work for law sharps a heap, though, and a whole lot o' worry fer Buffler, by doin' et; and I reckon thet is his game."

"A funny thing was hinted to me in the town to-day," said Pawnee. "It was said that we have run the

girl out of the country, so that we could hold these claims for ourselves, and that we had planned to take them for our own when we went into the thing. And there are men in Silver Bow believing it. So, you see, we have got to find her, if for no other reason than to prove we couldn't dream of doing a thing of that kind."

Swinging down from Hide-rack, Nomad began to inspect the new claim stakes.

"Waugh!" he exclaimed. "Looky hyar. A Ute moccasin track. Great snakes! Ye don't allow thet ther Utes could 'a' changed these stakes, do ye?"

Little Cayuse flashed his revolver and swung round. "Plenty Ute!" he whispered. "Wuh!"

He and Nomad were on the ground, but Pawnee was in the saddle when the discovery was made that they were surrounded by Utes. Every bush and rock had hid one, but now they were sliding into view, more than a score in number. The remarkable thing, which did not escape attention, was that the Utes were in war paint.

These Utes, heretofore, had not been of the war-paint variety; they had seemed to be a degraded type of redskins, existing only for the purpose of loafing, begging, and drinking whisky when they could get it. Old Porcupine, their chief, had been as bad as the rest of them.

"Wuh!" exclaimed the Piute. "Me no like."

Pawnee's hand had dropped to his revolver, and Nomad was fingering the lock of his rifle, at the same time moving toward Hide-rack.

"I reckon, Pawnee, et's a fight," said Nomad; "plum' looks et."

"On-she-ma-da! You're right. But mebbys there's some misunderstanding. Can this be old Porcupine's dirty crowd?"

"Off ther is ole Porkypine hisself, ef my eyes ain't in er eclipse. He's got a shiny new rifle, and seems ter be ready ter plug ye, an' is w'arin' feathers ernough ter fit out a bonnet fer any s'ciety lady. I can get him frum hyar, ef ye gives me ther word, and then we can jump fer et."

"Recklect," Nomad added, when he saw Pawnee Bill hesitating, "thet ole Porkypine ain't got no likin' fer ye. We dipped in, ye know, and whipped his crowd good, or, ruther, skeered 'em half ter death, thet time when they war tryin' ter git at Merrill and his gal, and Porkypine ain't forgot et."

Suddenly old Porcupine called out a command to surrender, wording it in fair enough English, and threw up his shining rifle to emphasize the command.

"Is this the way to treat friends?" cried Pawnee, with a grim attempt at humor. "We come seeking you, with honey on our lips and——"

He stopped suddenly.

The object of their search, Olive Merrill, had risen into view, close beside the threatening Ute chief.

"Don't make a fight," she urged, "for you will be killed if you do."

"Waugh!" grunted Nomad. "She is shore with 'em."

Yit she don't seem ter be no pris'ner, like what we expected."

Little Cayuse, reaching the side of Navi, sprang nimbly to the back of the pony.

A dozen rifles and revolvers covered him.

"Don't try it!" cried the girl. "You'll be killed."

"Wuh!" the Piute shouted, ready for a fight and a race. "Mebbyso we be killed anyhow, huh?"

"You'll be killed, if you try to get away," she said, coming forward. "You see the Utes, and there are more farther back. You can't get away."

"It begins to look as if we chased ourselves down here on a fool's errand," Pawnee said to her. "We came down here looking for you, because it had been suggested you had been captured by the Utes, though it seemed unlikely."

"I was," she declared.

"You don't seem to be a prisoner."

"I am, and so is my father!"

"Waugh!" sputtered Nomad. "He's hyar, too! Thet's plum' cur'us, fer he war missin' out of a stage over on ther San Juan trail."

"I'll explain it as soon as I can. But Porcupine has asked me to tell you to surrender."

"An' be hashed by Ute hatchets arterwards," growled Nomad. "Young lady, I prefars ter die fightin', ef so be I has ter go under."

"You'll die sure, if you begin the fighting. So you'd better surrender," she advised.

Old Porcupine shouted something in angry Ute.

"He says he will open on you at once, if you don't surrender," she added. "For Heaven's sake, men, don't you value your lives? Put down your guns."

Pawnee Bill shifted his revolver so that it bore on the Ute chief.

"Tell my friend, Porcupine, that I've got him covered, and if any one goes under he'll go first. We're not anxious to fight, but we don't intend to surrender and be slaughtered. You know these ki-yis, Miss Merrill, and you'll know if it is safe for us to surrender to them."

The girl spoke quickly in Ute to Porcupine. And he answered.

"He says there will be no fight if you surrender, and he will not hurt you."

"Can you guarantee it?" demanded Pawnee. "You know them!"

"Yes, I guarantee it. The trouble is about the placer. If you will promise to drop this placer matter, they will let you go."

"Waugh!" grumbled the borderman.

"So that's the milk in the coconut—the African in the woodpile?" muttered Pawnee. "We'll surrender, but we'll promise nothing. That's up to Pard Cody, who is engineering the placer business. But say to Porcupine that if he will send us to Cody, we'll bear any message he desires."

The result, ultimately, was that Pawnee Bill and those with him surrendered to the Utes—not because they wished to, or did so without great fears, but be-

cause it seemed the only thing possible, without a fight in which the chances were they would be cut down.

"I'd rather be a prisoner than a dead man, old Diamond," said Pawnee to the grumbling borderman; "that's the way I look at it. So I vote to lay down our arms and be peaceable. If we don't like conditions afterward, we can probably jump out. At any rate, we won't be held long before Pard Cody will be down here seeing what is the matter."

Not without many expressed misgivings did old Nomad yield up his weapons to the Utes who hustled forward to get them.

But the power of the girl with these Utes was shown to be considerable. At any rate, she was able to sway old Porcupine, and, through him, rule them, even though, when the surrender was made, some of the more vicious of the redskins showed a lively desire to want to make use of their hatchets.

The prisoners were conducted away from the river, and were held without being bound. They were permitted to talk with Porcupine and the girl. Mark Merrill was there, also as a prisoner, but not bound, and he showed an eager readiness to enlighten the new prisoners. But the girl did most of the speaking, and Pawnee's questions were chiefly directed to her.

"It's the placer," she repeated. "Porcupine says that it belongs to the Utes, because I was living with them when I found it, and they first worked it. They kept all knowledge of it from the white men as long as they could, for they knew the white men in Silver Bow would try to take it from them. When trouble came first they fled, being afraid of the white men; but then they met a large number of Utes that had gone down to the Perdidas from the Nueces. You've noticed how many Utes there are here."

"It's too apparent," said Pawnee, with a smile. He was determined to meet the unpleasant situation in a light-hearted manner. "When the rocks blossomed with their head feathers I thought the land was suddenly sprouting bushes with plumes for flowers."

"An' ther paint!" said Nomad. "They must er been robbin' a paint store recent."

"There are a hundred Ute warriors here, and near here," said the girl; "and more are coming. By tomorrow Porcupine will have two hundred warriors. It has made him bold, and he is ready to fight."

"Ai!" the chief grunted. He understood every word. "Fight white tinhorn quick for the gold in river."

"And you?" asked Pawnee of the girl. "I admit that I don't understand your attitude."

She lowered her voice.

"All this trouble was started because that placer is being claimed for me; so the Utes understand it, anyway. They say that Pa-e-has-ka and the men of Silver Bow have said they will take it for me, but the Utes believe the white men are thieves and want it for themselves. The Utes say that if I send word to Pa-e-has-ka and the white men that I don't want the placer, but want the Utes to have it, that will show

if the white men are honest. If the Utes are permitted to have it they will not take up the hatchet, but will let me and my father go, and also will release you and your friends."

"So that's the way the land lies?"

"For that reason I have decided to give up any claim I may have to the placer."

"You'd turn it over to the Utes?"

"Young lady, ye don't seem ter know ther great vally o' thet sand bank o' gold!" said Nomad.

"I value people's lives more," she declared. "The Utes are ready to fight; some of the younger men are wild for it. They will raid the country. Houses will be burned, and men, women, and children will be killed. I should feel responsible, so I give it up. The Utes can have it."

"I rather think," said Pawnee, dropping his voice, "that these Utes would turn tail and chase themselves out of this country faster than they ever came into it, if they once butted into the white men. So I think you're foolish."

But she was obdurate on that point. She felt that she was called on to sacrifice the mine to save lives.

Then she told how she had fallen into the hands of the Utes.

"Thet 'ere's been er puzzler ter me," Nomad urged, questioning her about it. "You war over ter San Juan an' so was yer dad; an' ther Utes war out this erway. Besides, you war in ther town; and how ther Utes got ye out, an' down hyar, has gummed up ther cogs o' my thinkin' machine."

"Make um pasear over to San Juan," grunted old Porcupine, overhearing this.

"The Utes had fled from here, you recollect," explained the girl. "They went toward San Juan, then. They were under cover close by the trail when father and I went through to San Juan in the stage, and so they saw us."

"That afternoon, when I went out to buy a few things, a Ute woman, whom I knew well, came up to me on the street, and said that her baby, in a tepee just outside of the town, was very sick. She begged me to go out and see if I couldn't do something for it. She had come in to look for a doctor, but preferred that I should go. She said several of the Utes who had fled from this place were in camp together, and most of them were afraid to enter San Juan."

"So I went, for I had helped her once before. When I got there I found there was no sick baby, and I was held. She had been sent in by the Utes to get me to come out, so they could hold me."

"Which et plum' proves thet er Ute's word ain't wuth shucks," said Nomad, who still refused to resign himself to the situation.

"The Utes pulled down their tepees and started off with me, in this direction. But they camped that night by the trail. They were not far off when the stage came by and was attacked. Father was in the stage, and he escaped by running. But he ran into the midst of the Utes. That explains why he is here now."

"Easy as easy," assented Pawnee, "when you know how it all happened. It looked like a big mystery, and it isn't."

"Then," said the girl, "they came on to the Perdidas."

"And laid fer us," growled Nomad. "They shore collected healthy specimens."

"Which is the same as to say that we were all fools," said Pawnee, with a laugh, still determined to face the situation with a light heart.

"I ain't plasterin' any burs and nettles in with my words," declared Nomad, "but ef anybody thinks thet he feels 'em stickin' him, et ain't my fault."

"You old cimarron, you'd rather have loped off with a load of Ute lead under your hide! Is that it?"

"Mebbyso," the borderman admitted, with a grin. "Anyhow, thar'd shore been some Utes carryin' mine."

"Me no like um git killed," said the Piute, "but me no like um this."

"You've got company, Cayuse," said Pawnee.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAWNEE'S PLAN.

"Aire we goin' ter set hyar like er row o' bumps on er log, an' wait fer ther skies ter rain down friends an' liberty, er aire we goin' ter try ter carve out our own salvation?" grumbled Nomad, some hours afterward, when his patience was becoming overstrained.

"I have been some time planning how we can do a little of that kind of carving, old Diamond," Pawnee answered mildly.

"Well, I ain't heerd et!"

"I haven't planned it yet, to my own complete satisfaction. I don't want to raise your hopes, and then have 'em drop with a squash like a rotten melon."

"Waal, suthin' has plum' got ter be did. Night is a-comin' on, an' this hyar hunkerin' down 'mongst these Utes is makin' me as tired as a settin' hen. What's yer plan, so fur as you has shaped et?"

"They're too many to fight."

"Don't I know et? A hundred red ki-yis, wi' knives an' guns, not ter mention revolvers an' lances. Shore we cain't fight 'em. Et will have ter be er sneak in the dark. Off thar is ther Perdidas, and down by et is ole Hide-rack, tergether with Chick-Chick and Navi, along o' the Ute caballos. Ef I c'd git my legs over Hide-rack, with good dark round me, I'd shore give ther Utes er run fer their money."

"We want to take the girl and her father with us, when we make our break," said Pawnee. "It seems to me that's almost as important as getting away ourselves."

"Waugh! They wouldn't go. Thet gal is plum' bent on sacreficin' her fool self, and her dad with her. Jes' bercause she has lived wi' ole Porcupine's Utes, and knows 'em so well, bein' brought up with 'em frum a baby, she thinks duty is bawlin' at her through er

golden trumpet, to stand by 'em now. Er waugh! An' thet, arter ther scan'lous way they has treated her!"

"That's hardly a fair statement, old Diamond!" Pawnee urged. "She thinks if she stays now with the Utes, for a time, and gives over all claim to the placer, she will keep the Utes from rushing out and killing a lot of white women and children."

"She'd ort ter know they'd git wiped out tharselves doin' et."

"She does know that—and has said so to Porcupine; but she believes, too, that white people would be killed and white homes destroyed before the Utes could be conquered."

"It wouldn't happen. They'd chase toward Silver Bow, then they'd chase back; an' thet would end et."

"As she believes otherwise, we've got to consider her viewpoint."

"Waal, what do you think?"

"That she's mistaken about that. These Utes aren't such fire eaters, even though they have put on paint and feathers. If they were the genuine old sort, they'd have fried us before this in torture fires, instead of letting us loll round and smoke good tobacco. Whisky and contact with white men have done that for them."

"Glee-ory ter whisky! I ain't never had call ter praise ther pizen truck before."

"She doesn't think that, and she is controlling her father."

"Ef these hyar Utes only knowed thet ther ole hermit is ther man what stuck up them Klan o' Kan notices, and hid out in ther brush and shot Utes by ther dozen with his ole rifle, he shore wouldn't last no longer than a snow bank in Sahairy."*

"As you might be overheard," said Pawnee, casting a quick glance round, "you'd better keep still here about that. What they don't know won't hurt them, nor him."

"Still, they don't like him, you bet!"

"The influence of the girl is protecting him now. So, if we get her out of this Ute camp, we've got to take him, too; otherwise, he wouldn't last long."

"Shore he wouldn't. You aire thinkin' o' kangarooin' out er this Ute camp wi' 'em by main force?"

"In two hours or so," said Pawnee cautiously, "it will be dark down here by the river. The Utes have got spies sashayin' round in the direction of the town. Give them two or three hours more for the spies to get in. That will be along about ten o'clock. Up to that time a lot of the braves will be crow hopping here, to keep their courage up; and that means that the camp will be filled with noise. It means, too, that nearly all the Utes who aren't crow hopping will be watching those who are. Now, if we could get hold of the girl and her father, and make a safe crawl down to the horses, the rest would be easy, wouldn't it?"

*See last week's issue, "Buffalo Bill and the Klan of Kan," No. 449.

"So thet's yer plan?"

"Yes."

The old borderman passed his fingers through his beard, while he reflected on this.

"Thar ain't but three of us—you an' me an' Little Cayuse," he muttered. "An' we aire asked ter handle two live people, and git out er ther camp with 'em. Still, I reckon we c'd do et—at a pinch."

"What do you think of me sounding Merrill?"

"Waal, he's a bat, so ye cain't tell what he'd do. It'd be as safe guessin' which way er cat would jump. Las' week he war wild erg'inst ther Utes, 'cause they war holdin' his gal, and had massacred his fambly. Now he's hyar, meek ez a vil'et an' apeerently as dang'rous. Whatever he reckons is ther best fer his gal he'll do."

"I think that's a safe guess. And if I could get him to see that it is best for his daughter to be taken out of the camp and back to Silver Bow, he might fall in with my plan. Then he would be helping instead of hindering us."

"On ther other hand," said Nomad, "ef he didn't fall in with et, an' blabbed et to his gal, yer fat would be in ther fire. Still, mebbe ye c'd resk et."

Though Pawnee Bill now made up his mind to put this to the test, he found no good opportunity for a talk with the old hermit until after the Ute supper time, when the night was settling down.

Merrill was sitting apart, gnawing at a bone given to him by one of the Utes.

"I don't know whether this here is beef bone er pony," he grumbled, as Pawnee dropped down by him; "'tain't big enough fer elephant, and it's too big for dog, an' tastes like a mixture o' charcoal and burned leather. Hope they're givin' you enough to eat, Major Lillie; they ain't me!"

"I think I'd order more and better, if I could hit a restaurant. I don't find it any fun, being held in this way, even if the Utes aren't swingin' hatchets at our heads."

"Me neither."

"Still, you think you'll stay?"

Merrill glanced round warily.

"But fer Olive I wouldn't—not a minute longer'n I had to."

"You haven't any cause to like Utes, of course."

Merrill choked on the meat he had chewed from the bone, and snarled wolfishly.

"Not me! There are some things I'll never ferget. But it don't do to think of 'em here now. If I let my mind run on 'em I'd grab the first knife I saw handy and jump for old Porcupine. But, then, what'd happen to Olive? That's what keeps me quiet."

He applied himself to the bone, and looked round again.

"You know what her idea is. Her mother was killed by the Utes, and she was carried off by 'em when she was little. She don't want that to happen to any other mothers and children."

"But would it?" asked Pawnee.

"These are some o' the same Utes that was at Meeker. You know what was done, then. They killed the agent, burned houses, slaughtered, then run off stock. What was it they didn't do? Old Porcupine was one of 'em, the old fiend!"

"Conditions have changed since then," said Pawnee, studying his line of attack. "The Utes were powerful, and the whites were few, at the time of the Meeker massacre. Off here a few miles is Silver Bow, filled with white men. The knowledge of that will make the Utes go slow."

"Olive don't think it."

"The Utes have been partially civilized since then."

"Huh! Do they look it now, with their paint and feathers?"

"They have learned the taste of whisky, and it has weakened them. And they have learned to love the white man's gold, and the things it will buy. That's why they want this placer, and——"

"And they say they're goin' to have it or blood!"

"Between this spot and Silver Bow are only a few miners—no women and children; and the Utes would move along that line if——"

"They'd strike the settlers in the valley further down—that's what Olive says."

"If we should jump out of the camp to-night, the Utes would move in the direction of Silver Bow, in pursuit of us. This would draw them away from the lower valley, with its settlers. And, before they could back-track and do harm there, my pard, Buffalo Bill, would have enough fighting men behind him to make them hike for the tall timbers."

"I'd like to be in his crowd chasin' 'em, with my old rifle across my saddle," Merrill growled.

"You don't think your daughter would be willing to leave to-night?"

"No, she wouldn't. She's a curious girl, on account of being with the Indians so long, I reckon; she's got a streak of Ute stubbornness in her, mixed with a new and ingrowin' desire to help the Utes and save the lives of white people. I've had a lot of talk with her about it. She wouldn't go, if she had the chance, and the Utes wouldn't give her the chance, nohow."

"But you'd go, if *you* had the chance?"

"I wouldn't leave Olive. She might need me. Utes, as I look at 'em, are half human and half wolf. Mebbyso when they are lookin' the most amiable they'd turn against her for somethin'. Then I'd be needed. My old life ain't worth much any more. More'n ten years of it was spent in a lunatic asylum, on account of that Meeker business, and what's left of me ain't nowise valuable. But I can still swing a knife and wield a gun, and, if trouble comes, I shore would stand up for Olive against the whole Ute nation."

It was a sentiment which Pawnee Bill could applaud.

"Her danger is great here, then, as you see it?" queried Pawnee, continuing his attack.

"Yes; but she don't see it. She don't want to see it."

"Then it isn't right for her to be left here, where she is exposed to such danger."

"Well, what can I do?" whined Merrill. "She's got her own ideas, and won't see mine. What can I do?"

"I've been thinking of this," said Pawnee, "and I'm now going to put it up to you. Olive ought not to be permitted to follow the course she has chosen, and should——"

"But what can I do?" Merrill interrupted.

"To-night my friends and I are going to get out of this Ute camp. We think we can make it by a sneak, while the Utes are enjoying their usual vaudeville performance. Our horses are with the Ute caballos, down by the river, and, as they're not far off, we ought to reach them without trouble. We could take along some of the caballos, for good measure, if we need them. I'm inviting you and your daughter to go with us."

"She wouldn't," Merrill declared.

"But wouldn't you think yourself justified in using force? All that the Utes are holding her for is because they want the placer. Yet it is her property, by right of discovery. You know that my pards and I have filed claims for it, which we intend to turn over to her. The Utes think the placer spells for them unlimited whisky and laziness. They deserve nothing at her hands. Old Porcupine is the murderer of her mother, and for years he kept her in his dirty tepee, as one of his family, trying to make her believe she was a half blood. Now he is still trying to hold her, after having kidnaped her through deceit. She owes to Porcupine and his Utes nothing but everlasting hatred and contempt."

"You're right in that," said Merrill, his voice rising.

"So it seems to me that you ought to see it as we do—that she is, through a whim, foolishly sacrificing herself for a lot of undeserving whelps who, if they had received their just deserts, would long ago have made the acquaintance of the hangman's rope."

"I'm ready to tell her so," said Merrill.

"No; don't do that. Just now she is looking at everything crooked. But my plan is, when the proper time comes, to throw a blanket over her and run with her down to where the horses are. I'll send Nomad and Cayuse ahead; they're so slippery they can do it; and they can have the horses ready—enough horses for the five of us."

Merrill had dropped the bone and sat breathing heavily, the old Ute hatred clutching him by the throat.

"You're right, Major Lillie," he said; "you're everlastingly right!"

"And my plan—what do you think of it?"

"It's a good one," he declared, nodding his head; "and I'll help you carry it out."

But when the darkness thickened, the prisoners found they were not to have things their own way.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLAN ALTERED.

Porcupine was a shrewd old rascal. Perhaps he suspected the plan that Pawnee Bill had been incubating. At any rate, he set armed guards over Pawnee and his pards, soon after dark. He made no show about it, no threatening announcement, but, one after another, Utes, with arms in their hands, dropped down close to the three prisoners, filled their pipes, and sat cross-legged, smoking while they watched.

When the first of the guards came, old Nomad fumed, because the Ute was armed with the borderman's own rifle. Still, he was not displeased.

"I sees whar et's up ter me ter break a ki-yi's head when ther time comes, an' collect thet gun," he reflected.

But when more guards came and deposited themselves on the ground he disliked the looks of the situation.

Merrill and his daughter were not guarded, apparently; though Pawnee Bill shrewdly suspected that they were closely watched.

He tried to get word to Merrill of the change in the situation, but Merrill did not come near. However, he was sure Merrill could not be unaware of it.

"What's ter be did, Pawnee?" Nomad fumed.

"We'll see later," said Pawnee.

"I'm seein' now thet ther trail is tore up an' ther programmy has had a wreck."

"Don't sweat, old Diamond," Pawnee urged; "the night isn't done yet."

"More plans has gone to pot by countin' chickens before they aire hatched than——"

"We're not in the hen business, pard," commented Pawnee serenely.

Furious with impotent rage, the borderman glared round.

"Waugh!" he growled. "Ther hermit is potterin' down toward ther river. D'ye reckon he's goin' ter kite out by hisself?"

His attention thus drawn, Pawnee Bill saw Merrill

moving at a sauntering gait in the direction indicated. As Utes were down by the stream, it did not appear that Merrill had thoughts of trying to get away. He seemed only taking advantage of the license afforded, to stroll about and stretch his legs.

But, after a few minutes, it was observed that Olive Merrill left the cooking fire, where she had been crouched with some of the Ute women, and followed her father.

Nomad cast a glance at the guards, saw that they were not heeding these movements, and, after hitching closer to Pawnee Bill, commented again:

"Thet gal, with her crooked idees o' Utes, is figgerin' thet her dad is thinkin' o' makin' a sneak; an' is plannin' ter give him ther double cross, ef he tries et. Waugh!"

"Mebbyso," said Pawnee; but he did not seem convinced.

"Ef not—what?"

Merrill was now learning that for himself, down by the river.

He had not gone down there to try to get away. He had seen the armed guards. Puzzled, he had sought for a quieter place, where he could think. His head was beginning to spin in a way that disturbed him. It was not a new feeling. In the old days it had come to him, more than once, as a precursor of a term of insanity, in which he became a crafty and murderous avenger of the wrongs the Utes had done him. It frightened him now. Pawnee's words had seemed to start it, and he knew, if it went on, he would soon be running amuck through the Ute village to his death, wild as a Malay.

Turning about, with the new frenzy shaking him, he encountered his daughter.

"Olive!" he exclaimed.

She did not see the fire in his eyes and the froth that was flecking his lips.

"Father," she said, putting her hand on his shoulder, "I have been wanting a talk with you."

"Yes?" he said, softened.

"We can't talk long, for the Utes will be watching us; but—I want to get away!"

A cool wind seemed blown through his heated brain, cleansing it.

"What is that?" he asked, his voice shaking.

"I wanted to ask if you didn't think we might get away to-night?"

"You would leave the Utes?"

"I don't want to, but I must. Something has happened which makes it seem that I can't stay here any longer. I can't think of the Utes now; I've got to think of myself."

"Yes, I'm listening," he said, his voice trembling; "I'm listening."

"It came with the other Utes—this new trouble. There's a chief with them, a young subchief; and—he has been insulting me."

Merrill uttered a hoarse growl.

"Now, don't get excited!" she begged. "Just listen to me. This young chief is afraid of Porcupine. But if anything should happen to Porcupine, the young chief would make me become his wife."

"Point him out to me!" said Merrill, his voice rising.

"No! Listen to me. If you should attack him, every white man here would be killed. Can't you see that? *You* would be killed. That is not the way to go about it. The thing for us to do is to get away together to-night."

Instantly Merrill's mind returned to the plan that had been proposed by Pawnee Bill.

"Some of the things you used to do were smart—you've told me about them," she reminded; "so maybe we can do it."

"Yes, I've got a plan," he declared. "Major Lillie suggested it, not two hours ago. But it will have to be changed. Let me see!"

The old-time cunning and craft began to come back to him, lacking the old insanity, however.

"Let me see! Nomad and the Piute was to sneak down and get the horses ready. Then I was to force you to go with us, and Lillie and I was to get you out of the camp. But Lillie didn't figure on the Ute guards. Now, the thing for you to do will be to get the horses ready; five horses we'll want—their three and two of the Utes'. Hide some revolvers and ca'tridges under your blanket before you start. Another thing that might be a good idea: This time you haven't put Indian paint on your face; but you used to put on Ute paint, and can do it quick, I reckon. Paint up, and the Utes will think more than ever you're one with 'em again. My notion for it is that if they should be watchin' you to-night, as is likely, with your face painted and a blanket about you, in the dark, you could slip round easier without being noticed all the time; you'd look a good deal like the Ute women. That would help you in sneakin' out of the camp. And for me—I'll take a chance to get down under the willows by the river. I'll pinch a pistol, or you can furnish

me one; and then, when I think you've had time, I'll begin to shoot holes in the air and yell like a band of wild cats. That ought to stir the attention of them guards so that it would give Lillie and his friends a chance to make their jump for life and liberty. That's it—that's the ticket."

Now, that it had started, his mind was working like lightning.

The mental shock the girl was given by the discovery that Pawnee Bill had contemplated rather high-handed methods passed away before Merrill had finished his hurried outline.

"It seems desperate," she said; "but, of course, we oughtn't think of going without helpin' them to go, too."

"We ain't going to think of it—no need to. And if a fight follows, we'd want them men bad. That's why I said for you to rake together what revolvers and ca'tridges you could. The Utes will make a chase—you can count on it. They're holding you to get the placer, and Lillie and his crowd to use as a club to break Buffalo Bill's head with, if he comes out with a lot of men from the town. I understand Indians—specially Utes. I've had a reason to understand Utes. So they'll follow, and there will be a fight, if we can't outrun 'em. We've got to whip 'em off; otherwise—well, our last case would be a deal worse than our first. What do you think of it?"

"I don't know what to think of it," she said, pressing her hands to her forehead. "You haven't given me time to think. But I've got to get out."

"That's the plan, then."

"Suppose they should catch you down by the river?"

"Maybe I'd turn my revolver on the Utes, and maybe I'd play that I had gone sudden crazy; it would depend. If you had the horses goin' and was getting away, I reckon I'd fight the Utes, and try to get to you. But if you hadn't done that, I reckon I'd play crazy; and then wait for another chance."

"But if your noise didn't help Pawnee Bill and his men?"

"It'd depend, as I said. Nobody can see to the end of a plan. We'll have to take the chances, and they'll have to take 'em. But if word could be slipped to 'em about this, so's they'd be ready, we'd all be ready to take advantage of openings. And it will be better for me to try my plan. You can be face paintin' and sticking feathers in your hair and making a Ute out of yourself again, while I do it. How I hate them Utes!"

"We'll try it," she said, in her desperation.

CHAPTER X.

THE GET-AWAY.

When Olive Merrill saw the dancers stripping and painting for their savage performance, she understood full well that old Porcupine was urging them on that he might get them in fighting trim for a possible clash with the whites. Her determination would have faltered, but for the annoying attentions which the young subchief again began.

He came into the tepee of old Porcupine, where she was painting her face and feathering her hair, and, regardless of the other occupants, he recommenced his blunt love talk.

Old Porcupine was outside, receiving messages from certain scouts who had come in, and giving attention to the dance preparations.

"He does not care," said the young chief, nodding his feathered head in the direction of Porcupine. "He knows if my Utes help him I must have my way."

But when he tried to put his arms round her, and she drew out a knife, he stepped back.

"You ought to be pleased," he said; "for, see, I am a chief! I have thirty warriors who follow me; only one other chief of the Utes has more, and I have a herd of a hundred ponies. When I saw you painting I thought you intended to be all Ute again."

She warned him angrily to leave her. And then one of the squaws coming to her rescue and lashing him with her tongue, he got up with a scowl and went out.

The girl feverishly finished her face painting, smearing the pigment where once she had taken delight in fancy touches. Then she wrapped her gray blanket round her, and, lifting the tepee covering at the rear, stepped out there, instead of leaving by the front.

Her father was suggesting the revised plan to Pawnee Bill at the time, she judged, for he was sitting near him, close by the fire that lighted the prisoners and their guards.

When Olive turned in the direction of the river she became aware, before she had gone far, that the young subchief was following her.

She turned back, then. She remembered that she had no weapon but the knife in her blanket, and her father had told her to collect revolvers. She would need a revolver, and would use it, she resolved, if the subchief persisted in his annoyance.

It was not easy to collect revolvers and cartridges. Nearly all the braves who had weapons of the kind were proudly wearing them, with crammed cartridge belts.

But in Porcupine's tepee she got two new pistols, without the knowledge of the squaws, and in another tepee, which she found deserted of its occupants, she got two more, with two belts of cartridges.

"I ought to have five—one for each," she muttered. "But the men can have the revolvers, and I'll keep the knife."

Again, when she turned toward the river, she saw that the subchief still was behind her. She clutched tighter the revolvers she had collected. It began to seem that she would need to use one against him.

Though she hurried on rapidly as she approached the stream, she did not throw off her red pursuer, who called to her, as she gained the high bank overlooking the water.

She stopped then, and turned defiantly.

"If you come on," she warned, "I shall shoot you!"

The threat was in good Ute, and he understood it; but it only made him laugh.

"Shoot!" he cried. "A woman does not shoot a chief who is in love with her."

A revolver flashed in her hand, and he saw its glimmer under the starlight; but he only laughed again and continued to advance.

Shaken by a terror she had never felt before, Olive raised the weapon and fired straight at him.

She saw him throw up his hands and tumble to the ground, as the weapon drove out its cloud of smoke and fire; then she turned and ran as if all the furies pursued her.

For a minute Olive lost her head; but, on hearing a roar break forth in the camp, she remembered what it was she had meant to do.

The girl was still so blinded with terror, and the horror of the thing she had done, that she was thinking only of herself. But, when she saw the ponies before her in the starlight, and made out the larger forms of the white men's animals, she began to wonder if she could not still help the white men, and particularly her father. She could not desert her father.

With the wild thought of getting horses and riding back into the camp, she began to cut the rope hobbles. Then she heard men running toward her.

"It's too late!" she thought, sure that the runners were Utes.

But when she heard the voices of white men—with others, the voice of her father—she clung blindly to the mane of the horse she had been loosing.

The plan, formed by Pawnee and revised by the

hermit, had been disordered through the interference of the ardent subchief.

Merrill had been flinging scrappy fragments of the new idea to Pawnee, under cover of the drum beating which had started up, while he warily guarded against the armed watchers understanding him.

Then came the revolver shot by the river

The drum beating ended, the dancers stopped their howls and their posturing, the tepees were vacated by their occupants, while the guards sprang up, and every one stared in the direction of the river.

The Utes, bewildered, anticipated the beginning of an attack by white men.

Pawnee's company did not know what it meant; but they had seen the girl pass toward the river. That she had been followed by the young chief they had not observed, as they were not watching for that, and Indians were moving about more or less all over the camp.

One thing they knew, however. The thing they had been planning—the attraction of the guards' attention—had been accomplished without an act of theirs. It seems to be up to them to take advantage of it.

They acted instinctively, without orders.

Nomad's roar rose—a terrifying sound whenever it ripped through the blackness of night, and he jumped for the guard who had his rifle.

The guard went down under the rush, and Nomad, catching up the rifle, struck him on the head with it, and tore on, yelling like a maniac.

Pawnee followed, snatching a lance from another guard as he kept at the borderman's heels. Then came Merrill, and the young Piute; the yells of the Piute equaling those of Nomad, though they had a wolfish variety that the old man's whooping lacked.

The dazed Utes and the startled guards did not recover their faculties until the prisoners had covered a dozen big leaps. But the uproar was so vociferous that Nomad's maddest howling paled into insignificance; and it was little wonder that the scared girl down by the pony herd came near losing all sense of what she was trying to do.

Mingled with the wild Ute yells and roars of rage came a popping of rifles and revolvers and a whistling of lances. The dazed redskins now got in motion and charged toward the river, hard after the escaping prisoners.

But, having previously located the pony herd and laid out the line of their flight, the white men and the

Piute, who were good runners, kept well in the lead. In the excitement all the Ute bullets went high over their heads, and the lances fell far short.

The girl had unhobbled the horses and the ponies that she had selected blindly; but they were startled and showing signs of running away, when the border-man drew near, with the others close behind him.

"Whar away?" he bellowed.

"Here!" she shrieked. "Here!"

"All right, little gal; we're all comin'."

Everything was coming, apparently—even the Indian dogs had joined in and were baying in loud-voiced chorus.

"Here they are!" she chattered.

"All right," Nomad roared at her. "Climb the one thet's nighest ye. We'll look out fer ourselves."

She scrambled to the back of the pony, though it had on neither bridle nor saddle, and turned it, snorting, into the river trail.

Nomad made for Hide-rack, and Pawnee for Chick-Chick. Little Cayuse seized an Indian pony for Merrill, flung it round to him with a jerk on its mane, and then, with a jump, straddled Navi.

His Piute yell rang out again, this time defiantly.

The Utes once more opened with their rattling fire of rifles and revolvers, but they seemed to be shooting at the stars, for the bullets went high and wild.

After that it was a race and a running fight.

As the Utes began to get ponies and drive in pursuit, old Nomad dropped behind and began to bang away at them with his rifle. This caused the girl to slow her pony, a thing she found trouble in doing, and she passed over to the men the revolvers and cartridge belts. Having done that, she led the way again, being familiar with the trail, while the men behind her tried to make it interesting to their pursuers.

But the Utes were still close behind, when the river ford was reached, and the pursued rode their horses into the water. They had gained the bank and were shooting into the darkness, when the fugitives clambered out on the opposite side.

"Sech a waste o' vallyble amminition never war seen sense ther world war young!" Nomad grunted, as he wheeled Hide-rack and pumped shots from his revolver. "Not a Ute bullet has teched hide ner ha'r; an' half this yar ca'tridge belt is empty, an' I reckon I ain't done no better."

But again they drove on, hearing the Ute ponies splashing the water on the other side.

CHAPTER XI.

HAMMER AND TONGS.

On the high ground beyond the river the Utes were baffled. In crossing the stream a confusion had resulted in their ranks, caused by the overeagerness which made them all try to drive their ponies into the water at the same time. In the mix-up, some of the floundering ponies unhorsed their riders, and a pony was drowned.

When the pursuit was continued, it was at first of a scattered character, with the fugitives well ahead; then the Utes, when they drew together, found that they could not hear the clatter of hoofs.

There is no warier man in the world than an Indian. Sure that the fleeing party had left the trail, and perhaps had abandoned their animals, the Utes began to suspect that an ambushade would be the next revelation. The firing of the white men had shown them to be armed.

So old Porcupine called a halt.

After a brief conference, scouts were thrown out to feel the trail, the main body of the Utes following slowly.

Pawnee Bill and his companions had left the trail, as soon as they found they could do so safely. It broke the danger of a direct pursuit. Another reason, as important, was that it lessened the danger of running into any set of thugs that might have followed them from the town of Silver Bow.

As a result, a thing not deliberately planned, but highly satisfactory, took place.

Tybee Johnson had sent along the Perdidas trail a number of assassins in command of Hank Sims. They had taken time, after leaving town in the night, to disguise themselves as much as possible to resemble Utes. The disguising was not of a first-rate order, but it promised to pass in the darkness. Johnson's plan, assented to by Sims, was to waylay Pawnee's party of three, annihilate it, and make it seem that the murders were the work of Utes.

Fate, guided somewhat by Pawnee Bill's shrewdness, willed otherwise.

Hank Sims and his assassin band heard the approach of the Ute scouts who scurried ahead of the main party looking for the missing fugitives, and jumped to the conclusion that Pawnee and his companions were approaching.

When the Ute scouts had come close enough with their ponies, Sims rose up beside the dim trail, and shouted a plain command to halt.

The Ute scouts, believing they had found the white fugitives, fired a ringing volley, and began to drop back to the main party.

Seeing, as he believed, that his holdup game was not working with precision, and believing he had only three men to deal with, and that these must be wiped off the slate at all hazards, Hank Sims ordered his men to pursue and kill them.

Each side, being deceived as to the nature of its foes, furnished a singular situation.

The retreating Ute scouts fell back no farther than the main body. Then the Utes under old Porcupine charged through the darkness, with ear-splitting yells and revolvers blazing.

Two bands of painted and feathered men had rushed at each other in the gloom of the mountain trail, and each received a surprise to be remembered. Hank Sims discovered that he and his men were fighting a band of genuine Ute warriors. And it took no longer to inform Porcupine's braves that the force which smashed into them was too large to be that which they had followed.

It was a *mêlée*, and a wild one while it lasted, which was not long. Each was as anxious for a break-away as is an overmastered pugilist whose antagonist is hugging him and hammering his face.

Hank Sims roared to his men to retreat before they were annihilated. Old Porcupine shrieked the same thing to his warriors.

The combatants fell apart.

Hank Sims had two men down, but he did not stop to get them, or even to see if they had been killed or were merely wounded. At the head of his demoralized party he hit the trail, in the direction of Silver Bow, every man driving spurs mercilessly and lashing furiously with bridle reins.

Porcupine's warriors, after their recoil, seeing that the white men were flying, stopped, in huddled and staring wonder; but they did not pursue.

When the last hoof sound had died out they made a search of the trail where the wild fight had taken place, and found two men dead. They had one warrior killed and several wounded.

Under the flare of flimsy torches, it was seen that the dead white men were striped wondrously with paint and wore the most marvelous assortment of head feathers they had ever beheld. Roosters and turkeys had given up their tail feathers, and millinery stores had parted with their plumes.

In addition, in and by the trail were found a number

of gray blankets of the kind used by Utes. But these were new, and were eagerly appropriated.

Old Porcupine and his followers were not so dull but that they understood quickly something of the meaning of the things they saw. The white men had been playing Utes for the purpose of committing some outrage that could be safely laid at the door of the Indians.

Naturally, the discovery enraged them.

The torches were cast aside, the dead were left in the trail, and the Ute ponies bore a frantic band of angry redskins hard on the heels of the demoralized party that was making its way back to the town.

They did not overtake Sims' party, but they came near enough to it to throw into it the liveliest scare the villains ever had been given, and hurled them upon the town in a pell-mell panic.

Not until they were in the outer fringe of streets did Hank Sims and his men remember that they were wearing paint and feathers. Then they drew rein, which they could safely do now, as the Utes had stopped farther out.

They took stock, too, of their condition, as well as their appearance.

"Two missing," said Sims; "and three of the ponies lame, with bullets. We'd ought to have left the ponies outside. And them two men! Who's missing?"

They counted noses and found out.

"Well, they're dead, all right," said Sims. "If they wasn't dead when they dropped, the reds sure finished 'em. But the bodies will be found, with the paint and——"

"That will be a sure give-away!"

"Not necessarily," said Sims. "I reckon you fellows know how to keep your mouths shut? If you don't, this is a good time to learn. Them two men are dead. So they can't talk. And the talkin' that the men do that find 'em can't prove anything against us, if we're wise. The worst trouble will come if we're seen here; and, later, it will be as bad when we have to explain about the ponies. You boys that have got hurt ponies, and hired 'em, will have to use money to satisfy the owners and keep 'em still."

He looked round grimly, glad of the friendly darkness; for out there were no street lamps, and the hour was late.

"Scatter, and get in the best way you can," Sims ordered. "When questions are asked, you don't know a thing—not a thing! Recollect it."

They were about to separate, when one of the men inquired mildly what Sims supposed had become of Pawnee Bill.

"Don't mention him!" said Sims. "Forget it—forget it! Now pike out, and hide this paint and feathers. Wow!" he grunted unamiably. "We're some Ute, we are!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE ATTACK OF THE THUGS.

The hour was late on the night following that of Pawnee's departure.

The baron had related, with much unconscious humor, his curious experience in the room of the fortune teller, and the talk he had overheard between the woman and Tybee Johnson.

It was a particularly interesting recital, and so informing that Buffalo Bill had the baron go slowly in his narration and repeat certain things several times.

"So the woman that lately was so anxious to have all sorts of evil things happen to Johnson used to be his wife, and is now in with him again and ready to throw the lance into our crowd! I admit I didn't suspect it."

"Since my inexperience mit my owen vife, vot haf tiworced me, I am oxbecting anyt'ing," the baron declared. "Unt for kvickness, dot change haf all der odders beadt a mile. Ve ar-re beaches unt cream unt honey, unt all der odder sweet t'ings, pefore ve ar-re marriedt. Budt der fairst day oof der honeymoons, idt vos a bail oof hot vater on my headt. Der secondt day she iss hidt me mit der vlatiron. Der nexdt day idt iss der rolling-bin vot I am handedt. Unt der next day I am looking for a tiworce. Yiminidy! Some vomans she vos somet'ing awvul."

"We might go down into that alley and look round," said the scout. "Her plan was to send me and my men there, by telling us that at that point we would be able to find a door which would let us into the lodge rooms of the Sons of Rest; then we were to be done up by a lot of Johnson's bruisers."

"Budt ve von'dt go now. Vhen you are invited to haf your headt cafed in, you ton'dt."

"My idea is that we could look at this trap quietly in advance, without the knowledge of the bloodthirsty madame; then consider how we can take advantage of her plan, after Pawnee gets in."

"Dot crowd ought to haf peen here py dhis after-noon."

"And here it is after midnight!"

"Yoost so. Dhey may have hadt some tiffiguldy mit der Utes."

"Cowardly white men to fight in the town, and scheming redskins to placate outside, surely provides a hard combination," said the scout.

"Budt I am petting on Bawnee."

"While we're waiting, we might as well take a look at that alley."

They went down to the street together. This compelled them to pass the door of the barroom of the Silver Nugget. In the barroom was Tybee Johnson, who gave them a sharp look as they passed.

Having observed this, they halted on the steps outside.

Johnson came out then, oily of manner.

"I haven't seen your friend, Lillie, round for some time," he said. "And old Nomad, and that Indian."

"We don't know just where they are ourselves," the scout answered; which was true enough.

"You haven't got word of that girl yet?"

"No word."

"Nor of her father?"

"Not a shred of news of either of them."

"That's singular, suh."

"We think so," assented the scout.

"My thought," said Johnson, "was that perhaps, suh, your friend, Pawnee Bill, and the others might have set out to look for her. But of co'se you would know, suh, if that is so."

"We seldom worry about Pawnee," said the scout easily, "knowing that he is so well able to take care of himself."

"That's so, suh. Pawnee Bill is a mighty capable man."

The sheriff turned back into the barroom, and the scout went on down the street with the baron.

"Vot iss der meanness?"

"Curiosity, for one thing; also, I suspect, he thought by talking with me he might be able to discover if we had been put wise in any way. Though you say the madame and her doorkeeper didn't see you, she may have suspected you. But that is only a guess. Johnson always feels called on to make a display of friendliness."

They did not turn in at the alley when they came opposite it, for they did not know but they had been shadowed. They went on toward the end of the street, every moment wary and watchful.

The baron got out his long pipe and smoked it, and

the scout gratified his love of a good cigar. Apparently they were merely idlers, finding interest in the life and movement of the streets under the garish lights.

When they came to the end of the street, where it started off as a beaten road into the open country, they turned aside, walked a block out of their way, and returned by another street.

For an hour or more they seemed to be merely strolling about. At the end of that time they were near the alley, close by the point which Madame Le Blanc had chosen for the death trap.

"You heard them say there is a secret door in the wall of that alley, and perhaps if we're now a bit cautious we can locate it," said the scout.

"Oof ve can findt idt, I vill try to see py der insite off der lodge room oof der Resdting Sons," declared the baron. "Dere mightd be some more oxcidemendt vaidting for me."

"And you might not get out so easily as before."

They approached and entered the alley.

"Well, we're here!"

"Unt notting pefore us budt some plackness, mit a lighdt adt der odder endt. Dhis is der hole vot I come oudt oof, when I made dot kvick git-away. Vare der lighdt iss shining iss der door leadting indo der blace vot I fall oudt oof when I hit der doorkeeber."

"So this ought to be the end of the alley where the secret door is located, leading to the lodge rooms of the Sons of Rest."

"Oof idt iss a segret door, how can ve findt idt?"

Walking along the wall on that side, the scout pushed here and there against it, to see if it showed a springiness suggestive of a door. Having done that, he walked along the other wall, doing the same thing. The baron followed him curiously.

The scout had turned, and was walking again in the direction of the light, when it disappeared. At that moment he heard, near at hand, a suggestive sound of running feet coming toward him.

"Der segret door iss oben, and der men haf come oudt oof idt!" whispered the baron.

Five men were leaping out of a black hole in the dark wall, where before there had been no hole. Even though the light was so poor, the scout saw that they were masked.

"Look out for yourself, baron," he said.

The men had appeared between them and the alley end by which they had entered, cutting them off from

escape in that direction. What was ready for them at the other end of the alley the scout did not know.

He was hardly given time to think before the masked ruffians were on him. Then he saw that they were swinging clubs.

The discovery was followed by a blow on the arm from a club, as he drew his revolver—a blow that sent the weapon spinning to the ground.

The doughty German was jumping nimbly to the scout's side, when a club cracked him on the head and stretched him out at the scout's feet; the whole thing happening with bewildering quickness.

One of the men, with an oath, now jumped at Buffalo Bill. That oath, with the man's size and general appearance, made the scout know the fellow was Tybee Johnson himself.

The scout did not intend to desert the baron, even though five men were assailing him, so he drew his knife and backed against the wall.

"It's you, Johnson!" he panted.

The masked scoundrel snarled an anathema and struck at the scout's head with his heavy club.

The knife turned it aside, so that it banged against the wall heavily. The next instant it was torn from Johnson's hand and transferred to that of the scout, who mowed a swath with it. Two of the five rascals dropped beside the baron.

Johnson rushed again; but the swinging club knocked him back.

Then the dazed baron got into action. Hardly knowing what he was doing, for the blow that had knocked him down had made him wild, Schnitzenhauser rose to his knees, and began to work the trigger of his revolver.

One of his bullets sent down a masked man; the next flattened against the wall so close to another that it spattered lead in his face.

Only two men of the five were on their feet.

Johnson flashed a revolver and fired at the scout, and followed it with a desperate jump, that bore back the club and hurled him against the scout's body.

"Now I gidt you!" cried the baron, and let drive at the other man.

The bullet cut into the rascal's arm, and drove him out of the alley.

Johnson, clubbing his revolver, closed with Buffalo Bill by the wall.

The scout did not want to kill the villain, even though Johnson was striking with a knife. He

clutched him, and they went down together, as the baron smashed another bullet at the wall.

The oiliness of Tybee Johnson had passed away. He had thought to assassinate the scout easily; but now, with the scout clutching him, sudden fear transformed him into a fighter of a sort to be dreaded. He was as tall as the scout, of somewhat different build, but as strong; and he felt now that he was fighting for his life.

As the fighters went down together, the man who had been stung by the baron's bullet, and had rushed from the alley, ran wildly out into the street beyond.

The first men he set eyes on were Hank Sims and three of the rascals who had been with him out in the Perdidas trail.

They had been given time to dispose of their ponies, remove the paint and feathers, and get into their own clothing. On their way toward Johnson's barroom they had heard the cracking of the baron's revolvers, and had turned aside because of it.

"In there—in the alley," panted the scared ruffian.

His mask, made of a handkerchief, was gone; his face was bruised and bleeding, and the arm with a bullet in it hung limp.

"In there!" he repeated. "Buffalo Bill is killing Johnson!"

"In the alley?" cried Sims, and leaped toward it.

With men at his heels, Sims did not know but the long-sought-for chance for settling his score against the noted scout had come. He had sworn to kill him!

Sims' favorite weapon was the knife, of the bowie variety. This he drew, as he dived into the alley.

In the struggle on the ground, Tybee Johnson had come uppermost, and was trying to break the strangle hold of the scout. He accomplished it, and began to rise.

Misled by the darkness, and by the report of the man outside, who had wildly declared that Buffalo Bill was killing Johnson, Hank Sims made the entirely natural mistake of supposing that the man on top, who seemed to be free, was Buffalo Bill.

He jumped at this figure, and drove home his knife. Johnson dropped.

He fell across the scout, who was trying to rise.

The baron, having shot away his cartridges, was spinning round like a water bug, vainly snapping the trigger of his revolver.

Hank Sims, believing he had killed the scout, did not care to come close to the baron's revolver—nor did he

know at the moment whom the baron was; but he wanted to get out of the alley before his identity was disclosed. And he went.

Other men came plunging into the alley. Word that a wild fight was taking place there drew them. Some were friends of Johnson, others his enemies.

With their coming, lights appeared—pocket torches, flaring matches, and even lamps.

Johnson was dead.

But the other men who had fallen were not seriously hurt, though one was unconscious. This rascal still had the handkerchief mask on his face.

The men who had rushed in with lights saw that a handkerchief mask was on the face of Tybee Johnson, also; they did not know whom he was, until they pulled this away.

An officer, one of Johnson's numerous scoundrelly deputies, bustled forward now, and placed the scout and the baron under arrest.

The scout did not object.

"All right," he said. "I'm extremely willing to have this matter investigated."

There was no investigation, of a serious character, then, or later. The masks told their story. Even if that had not been so, one of the men who had fallen, chilled by the fear that he was about to die, made a confession, in which he admitted that Johnson had got him and the other men to follow him into the alley for the purpose of there finishing the scout and the baron.

Tybee Johnson, it appeared from this confession, had sent a spy after the scout, had known of his entrance into the alley with the German; then had tried this coup, simply because he had been driven desperate.

Pawnee Bill and his companions came into Silver Bow an hour or two after this tragedy, entirely ignorant of it, and of the fight that had taken place between Hank Sims' thug gang and the Utes under Porcupine.

Thieves sometimes hang together. The outlaw who confessed did not implicate Hank Sims, and perhaps did not know about the part Sims had taken in both affairs. No one who might desire to do so could say positively that Sims was not in bed in his room, asleep, when these things were happening—a thing Sims claimed to be true, then, and afterward.

"Johnson got what he deserved," said the scout, talking it over with Pawnee Bill; "but I don't like to have some rascal jump in and cut the Gordian knot in that way, even when I benefit by it."

"From what the baron says," declared Pawnee

grimly, "if this unknown rascal, whom we think is Hank Sims, though we can't show it, hadn't done that, another cord would have been cut—the cord of your life."

"I don't think so. And, sooner or later, I would have had Johnson tied up so snug that he couldn't escape. I'm sorry it happened in that way."

Pawnee Bill was sorry, too, when he thought it over. Not so with the other members of the scout's company, however. Old Nomad averred, referring to Johnson:

"It served 'im right!"

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

The fact that the placer stakes had been changed made Buffalo Bill so suspicious that all was not right with the filings that he caused an investigation to be made. This was done, the day following, by an officer from the Washington end of the United States Land Department, who happened to be in the town, and took the matter up at the scout's request.

The scout's papers had been "lost." The filings on the placer were in the names of Johnson and certain of his friends. Moreover, the clerk who had accepted the papers from the scout's own hands denied baldly that he had done so. But he wilted, when placed under arrest, and his confession, following immediately, the matter was cleared up with a promptness that gave the scout great satisfaction.

Buffalo Bill had acted without selfish motives, and the thought that Olive Merrill might, in the end, lose her rights to the placer had troubled him.

The day following the death of Tybee Johnson there was a great exodus of rascals out of the towns of Silver Bow and San Juan. Among those who disappeared was Gilfillan, the superintendent of the San Juan mine.

That same day Buffalo Bill, with Pawnee and the other members of his party, cantered over the mountain trail to the Perdidas.

Some knowledge of the fight of the night had sifted into the town; and the bodies of the men who had layed Ute to their own undoing had been brought in.

Old Porcupine had fallen back beyond the Perdidas, and had gone into camp.

The scouts did not venture to cross the river. From the trail they scanned the camp of the Utes with powerful glasses. The Utes had beacon smokes on certain

hilltops, and there was evidence that the braves were dancing.

"Looks like er Ute outbreak comin'," prophesied old Nomad.

"I dislike to think so," said the scout.

"But yer sees ther signal smoke, Buffler. The Utes aire wigwaggin' thet way fer help. They've got meb-byso a hundred or two waryers down thar, an' they want more, and et may thet they'll git 'em."

When the scout and his friends rode back to the town of Silver Bow, with their report of the warlike look of things down on the Perdidas, a number of other men, who were timid rather than scoundrelly, suddenly discovered that urgent business matters called them to distant places. The stages that day and the next went out loaded.

Buffalo Bill called on the marshal of the town. He did not think highly of this officer, who, apparently, had been one of Johnson's friends, but he thought he ought to consult with him in this emergency.

"There will be no trouble," said the marshal. "I know the Utes."

"Olive Merrill knows Porcupine's Utes better than either of us can know them," said the scout, "and she is filled with fear. She has been wishing to go back to them, and I think she would do it but for the fact that she is afraid to now. Besides, her father isn't willing, and in that he shows his sense."

"I've heard about that placer trouble," said the marshal. "But it don't change my opinion."

"You'll get men ready?"

"Oh, yes, if it's necessary; but it won't be necessary. You and your crowd won't be called on to do any Ute war trailin' this trip."

"I hope you're right," said the scout.

THE END.

Next week's issue contains the absorbing story of "Buffalo Bill in the Ute Outbreak; or, Pawnee Bill and the Man Who Went Mad." It is filled with facts and incidents relating to Indian life, all of an educational, as well as a very interesting, character. A fortune teller plays her part in making trouble for Buffalo Bill and his pards. An old hermit goes on the war-path, single-handed, against hundreds of Indians. Little Cayuse gets the great fright of his life. There is much fighting with Indians under most novel conditions. White captives in the Ute camp confront a strange and very surprising situation. It is Number 551, out December 2d.

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